DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 435 CE 052 408

AUTHOR Mageean, Pauline
TITLE Overcoming Distance: Isolated Rural Women's Access to TAFE across Australia.
INSTITUTION TAFE National Centre for Research and Development, Payneham (Australia).
REPORT NO ISBN-0-86397-380-9
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 95p.
AVAILABLE FROM Nelson Wadsworth, P.O. Box 4725, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; Adult Education; *Adult Vocational Education; Foreign Countries; Postsecondary Education; *Rural Education; *Rural Environment; Rural Population; Socioeconomic Background; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS *Aboriginal People; Australia

ABSTRACT

The recommendations made regarding technical and further education (TAFE) courses and isolated rural Australian women were based on information from a network of people involved in or interested in educating isolated rural women (187 responses); isolated rural women themselves (12 group interviews); and a literature search. The recommendations covered these areas: (1) rural women's access to TAFE courses; (2) the educational needs of isolated rural women; (3) ways in which rural women's access to TAFE can be facilitated; (4) the educational needs of special groups of rural women; and (5) rural Aboriginal women and TAFE. Among the recommendations were the following: (1) provide care for students' children; (2) allow rural women extra time to apply for programs; (3) use self-paced learning and offer a wide choice of electives; (4) offer training in a wide variety of traditional and nontraditional areas; (5) foster contact among isolated women; (6) take the courses to students; (7) provide written information to staff about the backgrounds of and issues important to special groups of rural women; and (8) encourage Aboriginal women to lecture in every stage of courses run for Aboriginal women. (Study methodology and group interview guide are provided in attachments.) (CML)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED306435

TAFE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT LTD.

# Overcoming Distance: Isolated Rural Women's Access to TAFE Across Australia

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M Jones

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Pauline Mageean

ADELAIDE 1988

CE052408

# OVERCOMING DISTANCE: ISOLATED RURAL WOMEN'S ACCESS TO TAFE ACROSS AUSTRALIA.

PAULINE MAGEEAN

TAFE NATIONAL CENTRE
FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

ADELAIDE 1988

© TAFE National Centre for Research
and Development, 1988

Copies may be made by TAFE Authorities
without restriction.

ISBN: 0 86397 380 9
TD/TNC: 17.11 (Hard Copy)

Typed by: Eleanor Woods

Published by:
TAFE National Centre for
Research and Development
296 Payneham Road
Payneham SA 5070

(Incorporated in South Australia)

Printed by D. J. Woolman, Government Printer, South Australia

CONTENTS


| | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | | v |
| 1. | RECOMMENDATIONS | 1 |
| 2. | INTRODUCTION | 5 |
| 3. | WOMEN'S EDUCATION - A POEM BY A RURAL TAFE STUDENT | 9 |
| 4. | BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION BY ISOLATED RURAL WOMEN | 11 |
| 5. | THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF ISOLATED RURAL WOMEN | 23 |
| 6. | WAYS IN WHICH RURAL WOMEN'S ACCESS TO TAFE CAN BE FACILITATED | 33 |
| 7. | THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF SPECIAL GROUPS OF RURAL WOMEN | 55 |
| 8. | RURAL ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND TAFE | 67 |
| 9. | CONCLUSION | 81 |
| APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY | | 85 |
| ATTACHMENT I | | 89 |
| ATTACHMENT II | | 91 |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the advice and support of the advisory committtee:

Ms Cicely Bungey, Co-ordinator, Rural Women's Information Services, SA Dept. of Agriculture.

Ms Wendy Burns, lecturer in access, South East College of TAFE.

Ms Nicole Gilding, Superintendent, Access, SA Department of TAFE.

Dr Bill Hall, Executive Director, TAFE National Centre for Research and Development.

Ms Diana Penniment, Chairperson, SA Rural Advisory Council.

Mrs Roslyn Schumann, representative, Country Women's Association.

The project would have been impossible without the Rural Women's Access Grant provided by the Department of Primary Industries and Energy.

Special thanks are due to: Ms Maureen Allan, Senior Executive Officer of the Department of Primary Industries and Energy; Ms Patti Kendall of the Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; Mrs Susan Stevenson of the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia; The NSW Farmer; the Victorian Rural Women's Network; Mrs Eleanor Bourke of the National Aboriginal Education Committee and the Canberra College of Advanced Education Council; Ms Faye Gilbert of Women's Education, SA TAFE; Ms Joanna Hearne, Project Manager, RWAG programs; and Ms Robyn Mitchell of Adult Migrant Education Service.

Many other people involved in the provision of education for isolated rural women provided invaluable information and this is gratefully acknowledged. The many submissions from rural women were very much appreciated as they gave the project a great deal of first hand information. Thanks are also due to the colleges and in particular the co-ordinators of courses which I visited at: Cleve, SA; Adelaide, SA; the Aboriginal College, SA; Devonport, Tasmania; Wodonga, Victoria; and Albury, NSW and Muswellbrook, NSW.

## 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Rural women's access to TAFE courses**

It is recommended that:

- Subsidised child-care be made available for all students who need it at all TAFE colleges. For courses organised by TAFE at other venues it should be provided through other means such as mobile child-care or family day-care.
  (Page 14)

- A percentage of positions in all programs for which there is likely to be demand from rural women be held to allow country people extra time in which to apply.
  (Page 15)

- Central planning pay particular attention to resources for those groups who are not being catered for adequately in mainstream provision.
  (Page 17)

**The educational needs of isolated rural women**

It is recommended that:

- Programs for isolated rural women include, as far as possible, self-paced learning and a wide choice of electives to cater for individual differences in ability and interests.
  (Page 26)

- Programs be based, as far as practicable, on the expressed wishes of the students and the community.
  (Page 26)

- Training be offered to rural women in as wide a variety of vocational areas as practicable including both traditional and non-traditional areas.
  (Page 27)

- Time be allocated during the planning stages of programs to research potential employment areas, including viable entrepreneurial activities which students could undertake.
  (Page 27)

**Ways in which rural women's access to TAFE can be facilitated**

It is recommended that:

- During programs for isolated rural women ongoing contact between participants be fostered to enable them to maintain their own supportive network.

  (Page 32)

- TAFE, as far as possible, bring its courses to rural students wherever they are, rather than expecting them to come to TAFE colleges.

  (Page 36)

- Research be undertaken into informal learning centres in which TAFE is involved and TAFE non-vocational courses to discover their effectiveness as bridges into employment or more formal education.

  (Page 37)

- All TAFE colleges ensure that a complete listing of their externally offered courses be available on a readily accessible data base.

  (Page 41)

- A women's access co-ordinator be appointed in each country region nationally to facilitate rural women's access to TAFE.

  (Page 43)

- All TAFE curricula, as a precondition for accreditation or reaccreditation, be made gender inclusive and reflect women's and men's needs in both content and delivery.

  (Page 47)

- When courses are provided for rural communities, representatives of those communities participate in all significant decisions about the content, delivery , venue and (when appropriate) staffing of the program.

  (Page 47)

**The educational needs of special groups of rural women**

It is recommended that:

- Courses designed for isolated rural special access groups, or which have enrolled students from special access groups, be eligible for a special grant if this is needed to cover the cost of hiring transport for these students.

  (Page 61)

- Whenever programs are developed for isolated rural women, representatives from any specially disadvantaged groups in the community to be served participate in decision making and be consulted at all relevant stages of the programs' design, development and operation.

  (Page 62)

- A series of monographs be written to provide information for TAFE staff about the backgrounds and issues relevant to specific special groups and ways successful TAFE programs have approached these issues.

  (Page 62)

- Additional non-contact time for professional development, community liaison and support services be allocated to lecturers whose classes contain students from specially disadvantaged groups of isolated rural women.

  (Page 63)

**Rural Aboriginal women and TAFE**

It is recommended that:

- Special efforts, including designated funding, be made to encourage Aboriginal women to lecture in, and contribute to, every stage of courses run for rural Aboriginal women.

  (Page 66)

- Before any course for isolated Aboriginal women is developed the views of the potential students be sought and used as the basis for determining what is to be offered, how and by whom.

  (Page 69)

- Planning of courses designed for Aboriginal women include some means of ensuring that they are not isolated from their support group. Additional funding to be provided for this purpose.

  (Page 71)

- Module courses be developed for the certificates in health and child-care suitable for Aboriginal women to study under qualified supervision in their own communities.

  (Page 72)

- All TAFE courses provided for Aboriginal women be regularly monitored to ensure that they are responding effectively to the present and likely future needs of the community.

  (Page 74)

- Whenever non-Aboriginal TAFE teachers are to work with Aboriginal women they be given pre-service education about Aboriginal society and values. This should be designed to encourage them to be open to the different values and society in an Aboriginal community so that they can work with rather than for the women.

  (Page 75)

- When decisions are being made about the provision, location, staffing, curriculum or implementation of courses for Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women be active participants at all stages.

  (Page 76)

## 2. INTRODUCTION

TAFE has a mandate to provide life- long technical and further education to all who require it. The needs of groups such as isolated rural women are therefore as important as those of apprentices, although the women receive much fewer resources per student[1]. Usually when a program is designed particularly for young people or males it is offered as a vocational course with excellent resources and without fees. However, when the target group is women it is very often offered as an interest course and therefore must pay for itself through fees. This reflects the way society views men's work as public but women's, when it is within the home, as private and so of less value.

Government funding is restricted, and there are many legitimate claims on TAFE's resources. This makes it necessary to find out how TAFE can respond best to the needs of rural women within the context of its overall obligations.

The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy has pointed out that the government is committed to improving the educational services provided for rural women:

> The Government aims to foster this human development through the upgrading of skills at all levels of the workforce and achieving equitable treatment and access to services for people who live in non-metropolitan Australia.[2]

TAFE is available nationally but is provided by eight separate systems, one in each state or territory. This means that policies and practices in relation to particular issues, such as access for isolated rural women, may vary significantly. These differences should be borne in mind when reading this report which can merely present an overview of a very complex situation.

While many of the women with whom this study is concerned were not technically unemployed according to the definitions of the Australian Bureau of Statistics[3], most are eager to find employment or to find means of increasing their contribution to the family's resources, or to acquire the skills which would give them the potential to do so. Since the early 1960s country women have had much higher levels of unemployment than city women and both have had higher rates of unemployment than men.[4] For women to improve their employment status, and to have access to highly paid jobs, many of which have been traditionally held by males, women need better training and education.[5]

Many of the issues discussed in this paper are common to all women, others are common to all isolated and/or rural adults. However it is the way that these factors interact with each other that makes the needs of isolated rural women particularly pressing and at the same time has had the effect of keeping these needs almost unheard. While a considerable amount of research has been done into the needs of rural school leavers, little has been done to research the educational needs of mature age country women. Indeed it is almost as if they have been an invisible group in the community.

This paper is limited to isolated, mature age, rural women. In no way is this meant to suggest that the issues discussed and the recommendations made are limited to this group. Rather it reflects the realities of the size of research grants! Similarly a number of successful programs have been described which were chosen to illustrate a particular point; other programs are succeeding using different approaches. This report aims to present a national overview of the many different issues involved in isolated rural women's access to TAFE and to present information about ways in which this has been facilitated. It is hoped that bringing together ideas from across the country will help us to learn from each other and so be better able to meet the educational needs of this often overlooked group. In the words of an isolated West Australian woman:

*'Although we have come a long way in 200 years women in the country are still very disadvantaged in health, education and social activities. Let us strive for equal opportunities for women wherever they are . . . As we are only a small nation of 16 million people, we cannot afford the luxury of ignoring the potential of all of our women, throughout the country.'*[6]

**Notes:**

1. Pocock B. (1987). Changing systems: women, work and TAFE. Canberra: AGPS.

2. Kerin, J. (1988). Address to the national conference of the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia. Launceston Tasmania. 4 July 1988, p.9.

3. Unemployed persons are those aged 15 and over who were not employed during the reference week, and

   . had actively looked for full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week and:

      (i) were available for work in the reference week, or would have been available except for temporary illness (ie lasting for less than four weeks to the end of the reference week); or

(ii) were waiting to start a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week and would have started in the reference week if the job had been available then; or

. were waiting to be called back to a full-time or part-time job from which they had been stood down without pay for less than four weeks up to the end of the reference week (including the whole of the reference week) for reasons other than bad weather or plant breakdown.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1988). The labour force Australia. Canberra: AGPS, July p.2.

4. Rural Development Centre (1987). The post-secondary education needs of rural Australians. Final report to the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission. Canberra: AGPS.

5. Pocock, B. above.

6. Brady W. (1987). Women's studies program for rural women: women's interests and curriculum research and development, Draft, Western Australia: TAFE. p. 16.

## 3. WOMEN'S EDUCATION - by Helen Shiel, Cabbage Tree Creek

... I have this *very strong feeling*
that especially for isolated, country women
whose basic survival takes up often more
time than they have
then the time spent together
is not done best in a competitive
formal way that is recognised as
'accreditable' education.
Indeed many would and do fail
or more often 'drop out'
pressured by other demands on their time.

Yet when we did have the opportunity
to determine the direction of our education
to select what was relevant to us
(and each community was very different)
then what we did research, document, publicise
all with no formal curriculum
but with driving force
that came from within,
fanned and encouraged by each other
directed to contacts and resources by a leader
then in twelve months the results were equal
to third year tertiary input.

There were studies on pesticides and chemicals
because our children developed allergies.
Our partners died after years of spraying 2,4,5-T.
Our cattle developed skin sores and had to be put down.
Husbands, placid folk, became violent at crop-dusting time.

We were concerned about the family budget
with new tax laws, and hundreds phoned
and shared this concern; women are part of the economy.

Domestic Violence and Incest were issues again
of huge concern,
something we could set up
support systems for, again hundreds phone in
to the little group of women who had
chosen to look at this together.

A new history of the High Country
was recorded and written by young women
talking to the pioneer women of their community.
This is being published as a bicentennial history.

An acrobatic troupe performed,
the list goes on; over 350 women
in small pockets, joined hands via a newsletter.

The money went, the support waned
where do we go now?
Again the dollars are coming our way.
But somewhere the most important bit -
that of being able to have Self-Determined Education is
forgotten.

'We can't accredit something like that,
TAFE won't handle that'
I'm laughed at; by the folk I was sure understood.
Why can't we have the skills recognised
and electives of health, education, religion, lifestyles,
as the 'accreditable' parts.
I don't understand the system of TAFE,
even though I've worked in it for four years, now.
I don't understand the language anymore and I've tried.

But I do know that women need an
education system which allows them
to be co-operative - to contribute what
they can, when they have the time.

To do so, is then to tap a huge energy source
which communities, society, the world
will benefit from. I believe that
it is the women who can do this
and again I struggle against a system
I'm sure men created.

How much support is there?
I feel very much like I'm a loner here
on this one,
when it all seemed so close.

I'm asking is it worth
keeping on asking for things to
be done differently.
Or is the path too lonely and long?

Also I need to eat.

(Reproduced with the kind permission of Network and of the author.)

## 4. BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION BY ISOLATED RURAL WOMEN

The Rural Development Centre points out that women's typical life patterns are often not catered for in educational establishments which have been developed primarily to fit urban men's needs and culture. Accouchement, child-care, timing of programs to fit in with schools and women's basic knowledge levels in non-traditional areas are factors of importance to women which are often ignored in course organisation and structure.

At a time when governments, industry and unions are emphasising the need for skills development it is crucial to discover what are the key factors which will encourage rural women to participate in education and training. Research conducted in preparation for the very successful Farm Gate Learning Program confirmed that the main barriers isolated rural women face in returning to learning are:

- lack of self-confidence
- lack of self-esteem
- lack of alternative child-care
- lack of transport (or inability to meet petrol cost).[1]

The most obvious problem for isolated rural women who wish to access TAFE courses is how to overcome the barrier of distance, without using excessive amounts of time and money. The cost of petrol is high, particularly in remote areas and this can be a barrier for many women:

*'I couldn't go to the course I wanted to do because it was four days a week. That is four trips each of forty kilometres and just too much petrol, especially as I have to make separate trips to town for the children's interests.'*

Physical distance makes attendance at college classes difficult, and in some cases virtually impossible. Some women do not drive, or have no access to a car. Some migrant women, because of their cultural mores, not only do not drive but are not allowed to use public transport. In rural areas this creates enormous difficulties if these women are to have access to TAFE.

Some women are willing to drive enormous distances to attend classes:

*'Betty and Sandra share a property on the West Coast of Tasmania, about 150 kilometres north of Hobart. They are trying to become self sufficient, and the nearest place where they could learn these farming skills, in the non-threatening*

*environment of an all female class was at Devonport, a three hour drive each way over poorly made mountainous roads. They attended the weekly classes regularly and are now able to sustain the alternate life style they have chosen.'*

Time is associated with distance - few people can afford to spend three hours travelling to attend a class! Not all women are willing, or able, to drive over rough and isolated roads, especially after dark. If the car breaks down it may be hours before anyone comes by to help. It is hardly surprising that many rural women feel that they are (in practice) excluded from evening classes. This may be despite the fact that this is the only time the particular topic is available. Regulations specify that minimum numbers are needed for classes to be run and most employed men cannot come during working hours. The majority of vocational courses in country colleges are run at night, courses offered during the day are mostly restricted to traditional women's interests and, apart from a few courses like the NOW program, most do little to help the women move into employment or further study.[2] Although a few married women preferred night classes when their husbands could mind the children, the vast majority of the rural women contacted in this study did not. For single parents, and wives of shift workers night classes may not be a possibility:

*'Angela is a supporting parent with young children living in rural South Australia. She would have liked to attend woodwork classes but could not leave her children in the evening, the only time the class was run, so she was in effect excluded from the course.'*

The smaller staff of many country colleges means that they often rely heavily on local part-time lecturers, many of whom are only available only for evening courses:

*'It is hard to get well qualified/experienced tutors to travel to rural areas so depth of subject knowledge is often hard to obtain.'*

Public transport in isolated areas tends to be, at best, inadequate and is often virtually non-existent. There are isolated hamlets well over one hundred kilometres from Sydney where families have moved because low cost housing is available. Many men drive to Sydney leaving the women without cars and isolated. In some communities car pooling is very successful but in such small communities it can be very difficult to find a group of potential class mates.

The same minimum class sizes apply in the country as in the city. This means that for the less popular courses many students have to travel long distances, or may be unable to find a course within commuting distance.

At Darke Peak, a small, fairly isolated community in South Australia, it has been very difficult to find sufficient students to fill a class. However, when there have been enough enrolled and a teacher has come to the area, attendance rates have been very high. Women interviewed there feel that TAFE funding is unequally distributed. A similar feeling was expressed in Western Australia when rural women were surveyed and asked to comment on a possible program:

*'Very pleased that at long last, country women are receiving benefits that are taken for granted in the city.'*

*'Sounds like a good idea if it could be organised as we are a very isolated community and are missing out on the many courses available in larger towns.'*[3]

The Western Australian women were four times more likely to be interested in taking a course designed specifically to meet their needs and interests than in doing a general course. The women were most interested in their education and personal development, less so in its possible application to employment.

As there is no TAFE college in most isolated rural areas the local people are likely to think of TAFE (if they think of it at all!) in terms of a handful of successful, popular and usually traditional male courses, rather than to think of what it could potentially offer.[4] This means that women may stereotype TAFE as a place where young men learn trades, and so may not consider it for themselves. This adds to the educational disadvantages of isolated rural women.

Absence of child-care is a major barrier to women's access to TAFE. Rural women with pre-schoolers rarely participate in post-school education.[5] In rural communities often there are no facilities for occasional child-care, or none near to where classes are held. Many women are reluctant to leave their young children a long way from where they themselves are. Wives of itinerant workers (miners, armed service personnel) often have no time to develop networks for child-care. Even those women with supportive family and friends may be reluctant to ask them to commit themselves to mind the children on a regular basis while the mothers attend class. The Victorian Women's Consultative Council in 1987 recommended that low-cost, occasional child-care should be available at local shopping centres, neighbourhood centres and educational institutions and that inexpensive relief carers or sitters should be available to relieve those caring for people with disabilities (either children or adult), the elderly or invalids.

Western Australian country women wrote:

*'Day classes would be highly preferred providing a creche was available or alternative child minding facilities through TAFE . . .'*

*'. . . It seems strange to me that courses designed for women do not take into account that a number of women wishing to attend are unable to do so simply because no child care is available.'*[6]

As child-care is such a crucial issue in women's access to TAFE it is recommended that:

- **Subsidised child-care be made available for all students who need it at all TAFE colleges. For courses organised by TAFE at other venues it should be provided through other means such as mobile child-care or family day-care.**

The need for child-care is not overcome by studying externally:

*'Being out of town it's not like you can drop the kids next door or can ring the neighbours to keep an eye on them while you are studying.'*

In fact several of these women explained that one of the great benefits in attending classes where child-care is provided was that:

*'. . . it gives you a couple of hours of luxury to focus your thoughts without the kids always interrupting.'*

Mothers of school aged children are often able to be away only between the hours of 9.00 am and 3.30 pm. Country women may have no nearby neighbour to keep an eye on the children after school. Often women on the land must drive long distances to collect their children from the school bus. These facts place limitations on the times these women can attend classes:

*'I have to drive to our gate to collect the kids. There's a crossing over the creek which is sometimes floodbound - it's too dangerous for them to cross. So I must be home in time to meet the school bus.'*

Women who live on farms are often needed to help, particularly during busy times. Some work on the farm, others provide meals for seasonal workers:

*'In doing a course, it is sometimes difficult to plan. With a heavy commitment to our farm, I have times of intensive work, frequently with limited notice, other times which can be boring or frustrating. Three weeks of shearing in the middle of a TAFE course can be pretty disrupting.'*

So courses must be flexible and timetabling must allow for the farming cycles in the district. However even when this is done, there is no guarantee that the weather will conform to its usual pattern and so the best planned program can still find itself without students some weeks.

Some women expressed their disappointment at not being able to get into external courses as the mail service to their area is slow and by the time their applications were received classes were already full. By the time the women knew this, it was too late or they were too discouraged to apply for a different course:

*'There needs to be some way of distributing information on various courses available before newspaper ads list the time, place, etc. and not just to those of us who have already done courses and are therefore on the list.'*

Continuous enrolment is one means of overcoming this and is appropriate for many forms of external studies. It has the advantage that students can begin studying when they feel the need, not having to plan in advance when there may be many other pressures upon them.

To allow rural women equal access, it is recommended that:

- **A percentage of positions in all programs for which there is likely to be demand from rural women be held to allow country people extra time in which to apply.**

Similarly, isolated rural women doing external courses have been frustrated by the long time between enrolling and receiving course materials, and by delays in lecturers' responses to their assignments. Ideally modern technology such as facsimile machines can overcome this. When this is not available courses should be planned so that delays are minimal.

Finding out about course details may necessitate expensive long distance calls and this in itself can be a barrier to access.

*'If we just had some resources to tell the women what courses we can offer - I need an office with a telephone so local women can ring for information - all I'm given is teaching hours, no time or facilities for providing information or documenting what we are doing.'* (NSW co-ordinator)

The South Australian Country Women's Association[7] stressed the importance of providing counselling to students before they enrol, to ensure the courses are relevant to the student's needs, abilities and local job opportunities. Community liaison would enable TAFE to avoid duplicating courses provided by other organisations so that the best possible use could be made of available resources. Ideally a TAFE officer, preferably a

woman, should visit small communities regularly to provide information and course counselling and, where appropriate, local people should be trained to take over this function, using modern technology. When this is not possible, information could be spread by interactive technology or, at least, by providing a 008 number. Detailed information should be provided, which is written in a way that makes it clear that women students are expected and which relates to women's experiences.

Many rural women have very little cash; some properties, while self-sufficient, generate little money; in other situations the women have almost no money of their own, even when the property is thriving. Many rural women wish to undertake further education courses, such as dress-making, not just for personal interest but to supplement their family income either by sewing for other people or by making the family's clothes. In some TAFE Authorities these courses incur a fee and often there is also a charge for materials. Obtaining texts and other recommended reading material may also be expensive and frustrating for rural students. Country libraries often have limited resources and mailing delays may force students to buy expensive books. This, on top of the costs of transport and child-care, can make these courses too expensive for women. The South Australian Director General of TAFE has pointed out that there seems no logical reason why these courses should be charged for, while courses such as an introduction to computing are provided free in NOW programs.[8]

Women are under-represented among lecturing staff in TAFE vocation courses and in senior decision-making positions in TAFE. This means that some women may think TAFE is less relevant to them, and female students do not have role models with whom they can identify. On the other hand, women are over-represented in community based or what are generally termed 'non-vocational' courses which are usually operating on very restricted funds. For example, the very successful Farm Gate Learning Project in the Benalla district of north-east Victoria has been funded for two years under the Commonwealth Government's Rural Women's Access Grants programs which cannot provide on-going funding. It has no security of funding despite the need for it in the community and the positive way it is regarded both in its own community and by those educationalists who know about it.

> Funding levels and structures for women's education needs to be reappraised.
> Many women's education programs are not recurrently funded, while other important areas of women's education are based on the user pays system.
> Considering the increasing role rural women are playing in providing family income, it seems reasonable to expect that society should make every effort to ensure that they receive appropriate support, training and education to ensure easy transition to this new role.[9]

Finding a suitable place in which to run the classes can be difficult in very isolated areas, especially if child-care is to be provided close to the class. The limitations of the facilities available in local buildings may determine what can be provided. A New South Wales outreach co-ordinator stressed the need for people in this position to be supplied with a van so that equipment can be transported to remote venues. There are facilities such as mobile generators to transport equipment for courses in traditional male areas in some remote areas, and vans for labour market programs for the unemployed, but not for the women's programs. Many women who would like to attend TAFE, and to increase their employment opportunities, are not registered as unemployed and so are not eligible for certain programs and subsidies.

It is recommended that:

- **Central planning pay particular attention to resources for those groups who are not being catered for adequately in mainstream provision.**

Rural women tend not to be vocal in demanding their rights to education. Many who are responsible for providing courses for them believe that rural women are overlooked by central policy makers who are likely to be more conscious of the traditional (male) trade areas, more swamped by the demands of the far more numerous populations of the large centres, and under pressure from government to reduce unemployment rates.

Rural women, in common with other women, have often been socialised to put their own needs last. A typical comment came from a Victorian country woman who explained that she had not studied since leaving school as she has small children and a husband who works long hours with his own business and their needs come first.

When money in the family is limited, the women and their families may feel it should not be 'wasted on me'. Some migrant women are simply not allowed to attend mixed classes, or to use public transport to attend. Raising the women's confidence and self-esteem, and helping them to recognise that they, like everyone else, have needs and rights, is an important part of many courses for women, such as the NOW program. Bridging and access courses, particularly those not conducted in an educational institution, can help women gain the confidence to go on to further studies or to begin a career.

A newspaper in Adelaide recently surveyed women's opinions and some of the comments are relevant to this study:[10]

*'Many women say holding the family together is their main goal in life. But many complained that this labour of love went unrewarded.'*

Quite a few mothers wrote about their contentment at home, but one said:

*'If motherhood was raised in status, in the social and economical sense, there may be many women who would prefer to stay at home supporting their families and strengthening our communities'.*

*'One country mother said her opinion was that mothers were the "most underrated, undervalued, overworked members of the community and have little visible presence in our community'.*

The lack of recognition and low status our society attaches to their work causes many women in the home to lose confidence and self-esteem.[11] There is very little awareness and acknowledgement that women at home raising children and on local committees perform many complex, responsible tasks and their experience and maturity would contribute to their ability in the workforce or studying:

*'I've never done a course since school because I'm afraid to look like a dunce.'*

*'The course broadened my horizons made me want more and increased my confidence. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done to travel to Lincoln alone (an hour's drive each way) and enrol in a TAFE course, after being a housewife for 30 odd years.'*

Women interviewed during this report spoke about being pressured to be home to cook their husband's lunch rather than attend class.

*'Janet who lives in a rural area in Northern Tasmania explained that for eighteen years she had always looked to her husband to plan her day and make even the minor decisions. She had begun to feel uneasy about this and thought that joining a TAFE course might help her find herself. "My husband's first reaction was 'What are they doing to you up there?' when I stopped going to him and saying Can I? Should I? Although at first he felt a bit threatened he likes the change in me now that I am using my brain."'*

A NSW NOW co-ordinator said that many of her students' husbands were resentful that their wives were 'wasting their time at the course instead of doing something practical like the ironing' and some students said their children felt their mothers should be helping at the school tuck-shop rather than doing something for themselves. These women have needed a lot of support to keep coming and to recognise that they do have a right to do something for themselves and that non-traditional careers are acceptable for women.

Some women who enrolled in the very successful Queensland course - Your New Direction, Introduction to Trades and Technical Skills for Women.[12] were upset by the negative attitudes of some male students who made sexist comments and behaved arrogantly. Women in other courses also sometimes were very negative. Despite this, most of the students felt they coped well with the practical aspects of the trades and once they felt comfortable in the workshop, enjoyed it. Nearly 70% of the women enrolled because they hoped that increasing their technical skills would help them get a job. This indicates that some rural women are very interested in a trade career but that special support may be needed if they are to be trained in a non-traditional area. They felt their self-confidence and communication skills improved as a result of doing the course.

Other students are less enthusiastic. One South Australian woman wrote:

*'In some ways I found the NOW films depressing because they were very city orientated. In the country we can still follow all the advice and wave the flag, but having completed the course, gained some technical information eg car maintenance and thought about assertion skills, I can't see how employment is any nearer to us. My own skills are in a writing/literary direction and these are not needed here.'*

The attitudes of rural CES officers can also restrict women's options, as they often refer women only to 'appropriate' jobs such as retail or office work:

> Many rural women have had little formal education and have low self-esteem. While they have often managed the farm, maintained the accounts, can drive tractors, cater for forty people when shearing is on, and have often been involved in running community organisations, they believe they have no skills.[13]

Lack of confidence prevents many women from attempting TAFE courses, particularly if they are held in the rather forbidding environment of a large educational institution. Not only are the women isolated by distance, many feel psychologically isolated from tertiary education:

*'I found it very intimidating to come initially when I hadn't been to anything for fifteen years.'*

*'A togetherness to lose that sense of isolation. A chance to achieve, especially for women of middle age, I mean over 30 and older.'*

Bridging and community courses help many of these women to recognise their own potential and gain the confidence to undertake further studies or to expand their horizons in other directions.

As one college principal explained:

*'It is good to see how women progress through the course. Some are so lacking in confidence after being housebound and you can see them change during the course. Our NOW course is the one in which there is the most change in the students in the whole college.'*

Three of the students from the 1987 NOW course at Muswellbrook College of TAFE in NSW are now doing the open foundation course which will lead to a place at Newcastle University. One wrote to her ex-lecturer: *'You did a really good job; I'd never have even contemplated going to university before'*. The principal of this college explained:

*'Having seen the NOW program here in the Hunter Valley, and seen how it works, I'm fully convinced of its value and will certainly support it'.*

**NOTES**

1. Benalla Forum Inc (1988). Farm gate learning. Victoria: Benalla Forum Inc.

2. NSW Department of TAFE, Women's Co-ordination Unit (1983). Access to TAFE: country women and girls. Notes prepared for Conference of Country Principals, Deputy Principals and Teaching Registrars. Roneo, 12 October.

3. Brady, W. (1987). Women's studies program for rural women: women's interests and curriculum research and development. Western Australia: TAFE. Findings in this draft report are based on questionnaires returned by 77 Country Women's Association branches. These represent 1285 individual members' opinions.

4. Burns, W. (Lecturer in access, Naracoorte College of TAFE SA.) (undated) The expansion of provision of education in the rural community. A TAFE perspective mimeograph.

5. Victorian Women's Consultative Committee (1987). Women in the home. Melbourne: Government Printer.

6. Brady, W. above.

7. South Australian Country Women's Association. Submission to this project. 5 May 1988.

8. Kirby, P. Personal communication 8 September 1988.

9. Rural Development Centre (1987). The post-secondary education needs of rural Australians: Final report to the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, page 70.

10. The Advertiser. (1988, 13 September), p.22. (This survey had 2 350 replies from South Australian women.)

11. Victorian Women's Consultative Committee above.

12. Technical and Further Education, Department of Education, Queensland (1986). Your new direction. TAFE access course introduction to trades and technical skills for women. Queensland: Technical and Further Education.

13. Harris, K. and Pemberton, P. (1985). 'Barriers to access and participation', in The needs of rural and isolated women. NSW: TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit, page 6.

## 5. THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF ISOLATED RURAL WOMEN

The needs of rural women vary widely as do those of any large group. However they do share certain particular concerns due to their distance from the institutions which provide education for adults. Some of these needs are common to all women, some are shared with isolated rural men and others are particular to isolated rural women.

Little research has been done on the educational needs of geographically isolated rural women.[1] Because of their very restricted access to educational resources and facilities these women have special needs, and, in particular, they need a chance to share their experiences with other women.

The educational level of Australia's rural population, which makes up one third of the total population, is lower than that of urban people. Australians living in rural areas are less well educated than country people in New Zealand, North America and Europe.[2] A disproportionate amount of the resources of TAFE are used in programs which are male dominated, such as apprenticeships. Despite the fact that they have a higher average educational level than country men, rural women are, at present, not well represented in TAFE, particularly in the vocational award courses, which are the most likely courses to lead to employment. All of these factors indicate that rural women have not been well served by our education systems, and that rural women have a legitimate case for more and better provision from TAFE.

One woman on an isolated farm wrote about TAFE provision for rural women:

*'This is a subject which I and my district friends view with great concern.*
*TAFE colleges are the only way which we can extend our knowledge and keep ourselves useful to the community.'*

Another looked to TAFE for:

*'An opportunity for self expression and learning opportunities away from the closed family farm environment.'*

Women play many roles which have had little recognition in formal education. By offering learning programs in these areas TAFE can show women that their needs are taken seriously. When this occurs their self-esteem and ability to make decisions

about their futures increase dramatically,[3] and they are more able to identify with TAFE. This process gives the women more confidence to later continue their studies in other areas. Women's roles include:

- family counsellor (TAFE can offer such courses as building family relationships, stress management, time management);
- farmer (offering courses for women only on practical and management topics);
- bookkeeper (offering courses for small business, farm management, family management and household budgeting);
- communicator (offering courses on communication skills);
- craftsperson (offering courses in traditional women's craft areas).

These roles are reflected in the list of courses which have been most popular with rural women over the last few years:

- hairdressing
- deportment and modelling
- vocational child-care
- microwave cookery
- hobby and leisure courses
- basic education courses
- handywoman courses
- vocational training
- leisure, enrichment and hobby courses
- building and home maintenance
- literature
- politics
- TAFE outreach
- courses for the elderly
- home computers
- gardening
- photography
- pre-vocational and vocational courses
- English for migrant women.[4]

Many rural women have little idea of what TAFE can provide. Responses to a questionnaire for rural women used in this project revealed that many have little idea of what TAFE can provide for them:

*'I don't know anything about TAFE and their provision for rural women if this exists, all I can advise is that it needs more publicity.'*

To give rural women some idea of the type of courses TAFE can offer, the above list could be the starting point, but certainly not the limit, of negotiations for an isolated rural women's program. Additional courses could be discussed, such as assertiveness training. Some women who studied this initially had reservations about it but eventually came to value it very much. Many women wrote saying that they wanted to do courses which then led on to more advanced courses, in both academic and practical areas.

Farm women are now moving into some traditionally male areas such as farm management, and home and vehicle maintenance to allow their husbands to work off-farm to supplement family income. This has meant that women are increasingly looking for training and education in these areas.

Rural women are severely disadvantaged in education as:

- educational institutions are not wholly responsive to the needs of women;
- traditional values have limited rural women's horizons and expectations of themselves;
- they share the educational disadvantages such as restricted access to services associated with living in rural areas.

Effective bridging of the 'education and attitude gap' is essential if rural women are to enter or re-enter the workforce or further education.[5]

Helen Gribble, the Convenor of the Network of Women in Australian Adult and Community Education, is concerned about government neglect of community education in which 75 per cent of students are women:

> The paltry resources expended on adult developmental education prove that women's learning is considered marginal and peripheral . . . women do not play a commensurate role in decision making, and they bear a heavy financial burden as well. About 50 per cent of adult education is paid for by its users. This is unjust and economically irrational because there are links between adult education and paid work. Adult education is much more than bored, leisured women participating in hobby classes . . . women are a seriously underutilised resource in the Australian economy, and that many use adult education to fill gaps in an incomplete primary and secondary education. Women's education has been an important recruiting ground for some of Australia's best workers and mature age teritary students. It deserves to be taken seriously and funded adequately.[6]

Rural women in NSW who did the Introduction to Building courses stressed the value of learning non-traditional skills in a group of women. They were able to relax and take chances without feeling foolish or intimidated by difficulties or mistakes. Belonging to a supportive group significantly helped them to identify with the theoretical andd practical aspects of building.

For many isolated rural women, interaction with other students is a very important aspect of studying and one which cannot be met by traditional correspondence courses. One woman from Tintinara in South Australia described how she felt she had been living in a vacuum at home with three young children and little mental stimulation. She felt she was 'coming home' in a course where the other students shared her interests and wanted to learn more about themselves. Another student echoed these sentiments:

*'When Janet moved into a small community thirty minutes drive from Cessnock, NSW, with five children under seven, she felt very isolated and found it difficult to "fit into the community". She had no involvement with any groups until joining a NOW program. This gave her a circle of friends and the confidence to maintain regular contact with them after the course finished. She organises monthly meetings where current issues are discussed. Husbands and children are welcome and the group is so successful that Janet has been asked to speak at several meetings to set up similar groups.'*

The current rural crisis has brought financial problems to many country people, and some mining industries are winding down. This is making some rural women turn to TAFE as a means of acquiring skills which will enable them to supplement their family income for example some women are doing their and/or other property's bookkeeping. The nature of farm work is also changing, becoming less reliant on physical strength and more upon science and technology. This has also allowed women to do work which traditionally was seen as 'men's'. As they are sometimes ridiculed for this, it is not surprising that many women prefer to learn these skills in an all-female class.

> Both men and women are perceived as having a clear and complementary role in rural life. The actuality that those roles are often blurred, particularly for women, doesn't affect the basic ethos that women and men have clearly defined roles.[7]

In 1981 90% of women living on farms in NSW worked on the farm as well as at home and many also had a paid off-the-farm job.[8] However in many country towns the rural crisis has affected businesses and employment opportunities, and has especially limited clerical and sales positions where most women are looking for work.

Country women surveyed by the Rural Development Centre[9] cited training and retraining for employment far more frequently than any other educational need. Their request for courses in such areas as farm technology, financial planning, computer technology and management shows that the role of rural women is changing from the traditional one which was frequently restricted to home making and child-care.

*'On a farm mechanical skills are really important. We have pumps for everything. I need to know basic things about them for when my husband's away.'*

Many women are registered as partners in their properties, but feel they need to learn some non-traditional skills if they are to play a full part in running them:

*'One young woman attending a course in Cleve, South Australia wanted to be taught to drive a tractor in an all women class. She explained that had she asked any of the males on the property to teach her they would have laughed at the very idea. She wanted to be able to show them by using the tractor competently, that she could play a bigger part in running the farm.'*

Women need training in non-traditional areas, in new areas and in entrepreneurial approaches to traditional country women's interests such as embroidery and preserving foods. In mining towns employment for women is very limited unless they are trained in technical areas. Increasing numbers of women are being elected to local councils. Training in communications skills, assertiveness and confidence building will assist women to participate more fully in their communities:

*'A few ideas about what I'd like to learn.*
*I'd like to revise all the English and grammer I learnt as a child because I've forgotten. Likewise I'm so dense about bookkeeping I understand little about basic arithmetic fractions percentages etc. having forgotten all I learnt or was taught. No need to remember. For years. That I've become rusty and I feel embarrassed about it. You can't be stupid about anything in todays world!. . . I need to do a confidence building course don't ask why but thirty years on a farm doesn't do much for self image.*
*I'd like to learn assertion and public speaking. . . economics or basic car maintenance. Also filling in forms, taxation, learning to cope as a widow. These are subjects which were never touched on in my school days and now feel utterly panic stricken by a fast moving world.'*

Others want to learn about more traditional women's subjects:

*'. . . especially child rearing as rural women are isolated by distance from their neighbours, doctors, hospitals etc.'*

When there is just a small local population it is impossible for TAFE to provide the range of topics and class times which urban people enjoy. Community liaison to discover what courses are most needed in the particular area is essential, and to ensure that courses provided by other organisations are not duplicated. This way the entire community can share its resources, human, physical and financial.[10] In isolated areas it is hard to get together sufficient students to fill very specific classes. In this way isolated rural women are definitely at a disadvantage compared with city people as it is extremely difficult to design a course which will seriously meet the needs of a varied group of people.

To overcome this, it is recommended that:

- **Programs for isolated rural women include, as far as possible, self-paced learning and a wide choice of electives to cater for individual differences in ability and interests.**

Linked to this is another recommendation that:

- **Programs be based, as far as practicable, on the expressed wishes of the students and the community.**

One student comment typified a common complaint:

*'I'd have like them to ask what do you want to do, some of these subjects just waste my time . . .'*

When women in rural areas were asked to indicate the kind of services about which they needed more information, 26.1% listed government employment and training programs. This was the second most frequently mentioned subject.[11] Many rural women know very little about TAFE, and many see it only as a place where young men learn trades. They often do not think TAFE could be relevant to women's interest and careers, except perhaps as a place to learn a hobby. Women from many different rural groups are asking for information about courses to be presented in a way that they can relate to. Migrant and Aboriginal women's groups have asked for information to be provided to them in culturally appropriate ways. (This is discussed in later chapters.):

*'TAFE terminology is inhibiting: Unfamiliar terms deter people from making further enquiries as they are reluctant to show what may be taken as their ignorance. Please someone do something for we rural women!'*

Barbara Pocock[12] in her study of women and TAFE recommended that TAFE provide a broader range of vocational courses in traditionally - female areas based upon local needs and resources.

In small country centres usually there are only very limited job opportunities in traditional female work such as typing. Yet many women do not think of doing anything else and women who no longer have dependent children "are queuing up for any vacancy".[13] For this reason it is recommended that:

. **Training be offered to rural women in as wide a variety of vocational areas as practicable including both traditional and non-traditional areas.**

To do this sensitively, to anticipate possible vacancies, and to discover small business areas which could be developed will require time and research. Therefore it is recommended that before programs which will cater for isolated rural women are initiated:

. **Time be allocated during the planning stages of programs to research potential employment areas, including viable entrepreneurial activities which students could undertake.**

At the same time, traditional skills such as dressmaking can be very important, not just as an interest but as a crucial way of supplementing family income whether by earning money sewing for others or by saving money in clothing:

*'Women enrolling in so called enrichment groups . . . gain an increase in confidence. They gain access to resources and information, they establish support links and groups, and they often develop non-traditional marketable skills. For example, many of our participants run small businesses either from home or markets or from shops.'*[14]

*'For a long time Meredith had wanted to have a dressmaking business. When she attended a seminar run jointly by the South Australian Department of Agriculture and Murraylands College of TAFE a session, "Setting achievable goals" helped her to map out a clear step by step plan which she has followed with great success. She now has outlets in Sydney, Tamworth and Adelaide as well as locally. Her husband and teenage sons have been most supportive and are very proud of her success. Meredith regrets that she is not closer to a TAFE college (their farm is 100km from the nearest) as she would appreciate the opportunity to further develop her sewing skills. She would certainly benefit if such a program were available through distance education.'*

Similarly, cake decorating, usually regarded as a hobby course and so requiring fees, provides additional income for many women. These home industries appeal to many women as they are in traditional female areas, are creative and can be done part-time.

*'In our region there are about 100 women who have been working in crafts for over 20 years. In many cases they have acquired a high degree of proficiency and standard of excellence. Through adult education their activities could be co-ordinated, leading to forming a regional group which looks at improving the marketing services available, with a possible view to exporting.'*[15]

At Merriwa in NSW a collective of local women manage their own craft shop as an outlet for local produce and crafts. Another woman was able to do something similar after attending a TAFE course:

*'I saw a TAFE advertisement for cake decorating. I'd longed to learn this art for sometime so I made an effort and ventured to TAFE and then sheepishly to my first class. I attended one and a half terms and quit to be married. I really enjoyed the classes and made more friends. After our marriage and we'd settled into our old home here at Lucindale I was decorating for orders for birthday cakes. Soon I was gaining ribbons at Naracoorte, Lucindale and Kingston shows and so I started making and decorating wedding cakes. I really enjoyed this and it was a bit of extra cash in hand. I also used to take in sewing and I felt great with my achievements.'*

Rural Skills for Women, run by Devonport College of TAFE in Tasmania, offers an option in traditional cottage industries. Women who participated in this option studied spinning, vegetable dyeing and weaving, knitting, smocking, applique, quilting, macrame, crochet, patchwork and batik. This was one of the three sections (with tractor and farm maintenance and personal development) that the students considered most useful.

With the growing interest in our heritage and pioneers, traditional female crafts are at last beginning to be accorded the respect they have long deserved. Some traditional female crafts such as embroidery and cookery have been handed down for generations and there are country women who are expert craftspeople who could teach these skills. So distance education may be provided not just from city centres to rural areas, but also from rural areas to city students.

*'Why can't we make use of the talents of more local people in the area and of school teachers with special skills?'*

A woman who lives on a property 34 kilometres from Parkes in NSW wrote:

*'I myself take in sewing orders to supplement our income. This I can do at home, and not have to occupy a job in the community that some other younger person may be in need of. I was a self taught dressmaker until I took the pattern drafting course at*

*TAFE, . . .(this) helped me tremendously to get a more professional finish to my garments. Some politicians seem to feel these are just hobby courses. They are not. They are a very necessary part of the rural women's life.*

*In rural areas dressmakers are very much in demand and TAFE colleges can play a vital role in training young mothers and wives in this very worthwhile career. I feel the fashion classes are very much under threat, these give rural women the means not only of earning an income from their own homes, but also of supplying their own family with quality clothing at a more affordable price.'*

TAFE could play a great role in acknowledging the value of these crafts. Peter Kirby, the Director General of TAFE in South Australia points out that if computing and car maintenance can be provided at no charge in some courses for women, it is illogical that they should be charged for dressmaking classes.[16] As long as TAFE charges students for courses with high female enrolment (further education and interest courses), but does not charge for those which are traditional male areas (apprenticeships) there will be inequity.

**NOTES**


1. The Rural Development Centre (1987). The post-secondary education needs of rural Australians. Final report to the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission. Canberra: AGPS.

2. Department of Primary Industries and Energy. (1988). Education in rural Australia. Canberra: Rural and Allied Industries Council.

3. Benalla Forum Inc. (1988). Farm gate learning. Victoria: Benalla Forum Inc.

4. Harris, K. and Pemberton, P. (1985). 'Barriers to access and participation', in The needs of rural and isolated women. NSW: TAFE Women's Co-ordination Unit, page 6.

5. The Rural Development Centre, above.

6. Network of Women in Australian Adult and Community Education (1988). Links: women, adult education and work. Melbourne: NOWAACE.

7. Harris, K. and Pemberton, P., above.

8. Harris, K. and Pemberton,P., above.

9. The Rural Development Centre, above.

10. Schumann, R. (1988). Country Women's Association spokesperson, submission to this project.

11. Office of the Status of Women and the Country Women's Association of Australia. Dept. of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (1988). Life has never been easy. Report on the survey of women in rural Australia. Canberra: AGPS.

12. Pocock, B. (1987). Changing systems: women work and TAFE. Canberra: AGPS.

13. Office of the Status of Women and the Contry Women's Association of Australia. above.

14. A response to the Working Towards Work Survey of adult education participants, in NOWAACE, (1988). Links: women, adult education and work. Melbourne: Network of Women in Australian Adult and Commuunity education.

15. A response to the Working Towards Work Survey, above.

16. Kirby, P. (1988). Personal communication.

## 6. WAYS IN WHICH RURAL WOMEN'S ACCESS TO TAFE CAN BE FACILITATED

Community based education has been particularly successful in providing rural women with a pathway into education and a bridge to formal education. It has achieved this by providing them with a supportive environment, encouraging them to identify what they want to learn, getting everyone involved working together to achieve this goal, and by bringing educational activities to the women instead of expecting the students to travel long distances to the institution. The co-ordinators and tutors are often local residents who understand the needs, concerns and aspirations of their students.

Women tend to prefer an informal approach to their learning with shared responsibility, no formal pre-requisites and consensus decision making. Many women find educational institutions threatening, this can be particularly so in the case of TAFE which many women see as being male dominated. Effective bridging is needed to give women the skills and confidence to overcome this.

> The adult learning centre, community, women's and neighbourhood centres and a number of TAFE initiatives seem to be effectively providing this bridging process.[1]

Gregor Ramsey who is the Chairperson of the NDEET Higher Education Council stressed that educational provision for rural women must be structured differently to that for men and must provide appropriate support.[2]

'Skills for rural women' at Devonport College of TAFE, Tasmania, is a course based upon the specific requests from rural women for programs in particular subjects:

- Basic communication and life skills (Personal development)
- Maintaining accounting records
- Small business computing
- Marketing and selling
- Success in small business
- Cottage industry or
- Tractor and farm maintenance.[3]

Specifically its aims are:

- To provide training and/or retraining for rural women to assist occupational mobility.

- To build and develop self-esteem and aid in the development of self-confidence, thereby giving participants the options of further TAFE studies or careers in the workforce.

- To increase efficiency and participation in the rural industry and provide career path planning.

- To develop an awareness of the local rural scene and possibilities that exist within rural industry and the cottage industry.

- To mitigate against rural isolation by establishing a network of rural women.

Twenty-four of the thirty women enrolled in the 1987 course completed it, including two women who drove for over two hours each way. This would be considered very successful in any course in a city college! In the course evaluation, half the women said that it had given them more confidence, and nearly as many considered that it had upgraded their work skills. Students felt that the course enabled them to become more active in rural industry and more confident to continue studying. They learned about, and were more confident to try, new ways of increasing their incomes such as cottage crafts. The women considered that the mutual support they had had during the course had been invaluable.[4]

Unfortunately the women who finished the course in 1987 did not maintain their network or initiate further group meetings. To encourage this, it is recommended that:

- **During programs for isolated rural women ongoing contact between participants be fostered to enable them to maintain their own supportive network.**

This could be done, for example, by encouraging each student in turn to organise an informal activity for the group. These activities could be a visit to some place of interest or a coffee morning to discuss an issue. The important thing is that the women realise that they are able to maintain their supportive network themselves after the program finishes.

A typical comment came from a country woman who had been living an isolated life on a property in South Australia before attending a supportive course for women:

*'I was lacking in self-confidence and self-esteem. I felt I had no control of my life. I was desperate. Now I'm going to the Country Women's Association, School Parent Club. Next year I intend to enrol in the Certificate in Rural Office Practices, live and enjoy life - it's too short to spend being miserable.'*

In community-based education, hierarchical pupil-teacher relationships are avoided. Instead a group of adults work together informally, and all support each other. The program is organised around the women's needs. Ideally this means programs are run during school hours, child-care is provided and the roles and functions of all involved overlap. This all combines to create a positive learning environment in which the women can develop their skills, self-esteem and confidence.

Women who wrote in response to questionnaires for this project overwhelmingly wanted courses to be delivered locally. One woman living on an isolated NSW property wrote:

*'TAFE has a great deal to offer the rural woman in this way, especially if some of the courses can be held in the smaller country towns, in local halls or schools.'*

Women in rural Western Australia who were asked how they would prefer courses to be delivered said they preferred either short, intensive courses for students in their own community or a correspondence course coupled with group tutorials conducted by TAFE.[5] This again shows a preference for local delivery. Unfortunately in the most sparsely populated areas this may be impossible, but for many rural women it can be provided.

Farm Gate Learning at Benalla in Victoria is one successful example of provision in small communities. It consists of a variety of educational sessions for two hours once a week in local community halls. Local participation has been very high, with 20% of all households being represented. Each community determined its own times and learning needs including practical farming, personal development and community issues.[6] Important factors in the success of Farm Gate Learning were quality child-care, women-only groups, quality tutors, a community base using local contact people to run the program with assistance from experienced co-ordinators, no cost to the participants and real commitment by all involved. Comments by participants show its value:

*'Ideas, enthusiasm, companionship.'*

*'At last I've changed a tyre!'*

*'Exercised my brain, met people, learnt a lot.'*

*'I don't feel quite so ignorant of some aspects. It has given my brain quite a lot of stimulation and I am quite sure my family will benefit from this growth.'*[7]

A successful example of community-based education is Morwell Neighbourhood House in Victoria. Yallourne College of TAFE has joined with the neighbourhood house to better meet the community's needs for outreach programs to overcome rural isolation and lack of public transport.

Country people tend to value practical rather than academic education and often feel uncomfortable in a college setting.[8] In contrast, courses run in community centres and neighbourhood houses help rural women to see that education has something to offer them personally with which they can cope. Women, and indeed men too, learn best in a flexible, self-paced adult learning environment.[9] Women's courses held in a supportive atmosphere in which all involved learn from each other and value each other's experiences, have proved very successful:

*'I'm going to do the Certificate in Rural Office Practice course. I think the NOW course has given me confidence to try new things, whereas before I would probably have said - 'It's too hard I couldn't do it.''*

Goulburn Valley College of TAFE in Victoria has a women's centre in a building separate from the college. Women can 'drop in' as well as study. A community bus brings a group of migrant women who could not otherwise attend as their husbands do not allow them to use public transport. Many of the women later do courses at the main campus, having developed confidence and study skills:

*'I enrolled in this course to help me prepare to go back to work and give me self-esteem and enrich my life. I was going nowhere at home, I will continue with Business Studies to improve my chances of employment.'*

The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy has emphasised the need to encourage rural people to participate more in post-school education through more community involvement by defining, developing and managing their education at the local level.[10] A sense of ownership, of being consulted, and the feeling that their contribution is valued, are very important.

Successful community-based programs have been introduced in the South East College of TAFE in South Australia. The key to this success is its link to the community, using local people to be the learning centre managers in five small centres. The managers are aged between 24 and 55 years and all have strong local networks to that they can readily provide community liaison, student services, determine suitable courses to offer,

encourage women to join TAFE, assist them to find a suitable program, and provide support to the students. Students are helped to do any external courses - some are enrolled outside of SA TAFE, for example at university or at WA TAFE.

By actually being in the community, local knowledge of TAFE and what it can provide is increased, and TAFE is more able to learn about local needs and can market its courses. To attract students, education providers must be visible in their communities.[11] Using local people as tutors or managers increases this contact. Locals are aware of likely trends in local employment and areas where entrepreneurial activity could be successful. This makes them better able than 'urban experts' to plan programs to capitalise upon the strengths and potential of the local economy.

*'Five women working in an institution for handicapped people in a small community in rural Victoria needed to gain a certificate to be given permanent work. They did not feel ready to do this until they completed an eight week access course at the local learning centre. Now all five are studying for the Development Disabilities Certificate.'*

Wide consultation with the local community before and during the planning of the course also helps provide word-of-mouth publicity to possible participants. Using local groups and organisations can help ensure that target groups are reached and that people are contacted at an appropriate period in their lives. For example liaison with social security to make information available to supporting mothers who are close to the stage at which benefits cease.

The provision of facilities for study, including communications technology equipment, enables students to choose among a variety of learning methods. Learning centres also encourage student interaction with each other and the tutor. For women to have access to the centre, it is important that child-care is available. Means of minimising costs should be investigated, for example by renting and recycling learning materials.

Learning centres have been established in local schools to enable TAFE students to share the facilities such as facsimile machines and computers. However, it is important for women's access that these be available during school hours, possibly during the lunch break. This provides the children with positive role models of adults participating in, and valuing, learning.

The New Opportunities for Women (NOW) course for rural women run by the South East College of TAFE in South Australia is an independent, self-paced learning program using teleconferencing.[12] This has made it possible to cater for a very varied group of women, aged from 25 to 64, with educational

backgrounds from very basic, fragmented schooling to degrees. Most of the centres are located in schools so transport problems were solved for several women who used school buses.

(Unfortunately in some areas, regulations prevent adults using the school buses, even if they are not full. Changing this could be a project in assertiveness training for some women's programs!) Modern communications technology meant the groups could contact other groups and the co-ordinator and guest speakers, and assignments could be returned quickly using facsimile machines.

Learning centres are one very effective means of overcoming the barrier of isolation. In the South East of South Australia it has been possible to establish them so that no student need be more than half an hour's drive away. Learning centres illustrate an important principle and it is recommended that:

- **TAFE, as far as possible, bring its courses to rural students wherever they are, rather than expecting them to come to TAFE colleges.**

Community-based courses often succeed in raising the students' (and tutors') confidence and self-esteem so that many who complete them are ready to find work or to enrol in more formal education courses. Women who had finished the NOW course became far more positive about their futures:

*'I was feeling like a piece of furniture that wasn't needed and I joined NOW because I needed to find something for me to do and meet people. I am writing another book and having another go at part-time work, I also would like to do more courses in Communication.'*

*'I am looking for full time work as a nurse - hopefully plus get on with my spinning and knitting and getting my garden started.'*

*'I am continuing voluntary work at our local Kindergarten and doing an orientation course at Family Day Care and may go on to be a caregiver with the Family Day Care service or privately."*[13]

Unfortunately, TAFE courses targetted for women do not have the status, recurrent funding or the level of funding of declared vocational courses, such as apprenticeships, so this important means for women to access post-secondary education is very limited. This reinforces the low status of women's education and an unstable situation is created for both students and tutors. The lack of permanent positions for staff in many traditionally female areas, which can be contrasted with high rates of permanency in trade areas, affect the quality of courses in female areas. Problems may include higher staff

turnover, and the consequent inability to improve courses over time, or to develop the expertise acquired by working in an area over a long period.

> . . . state/territory authorities should review course offerings in non-metropolitan locations to determine whether country students, particularly women, are disadvantaged by a lack of vocational courses including advanced secretarial courses, librarianship, welfare, child-care, medical and health technology and care, horticulture, other certificate courses and general re-entry programs for adult women. If country women are disadvantaged, state/territory authorities should consider mechanisms to redress the difficulty including the expansion, and/or rationalization, of current country course offerings to better address women's vocational training needs.[14]

There is also a need to research TAFE's involvement in adult learning centres, community, women's and neighbourhood centres and TAFE non-vocational courses, to discover whether they are indeed effective in helping women gain the confidence and skills to move into employment or more formal education. If this is found to be the case then the funding and status of this involvement should be regularised. The flexibility and informality of what is provided must be maintained as these are crucial for effectiveness.

Therefore it is recommended that:

- **Research be undertaken into informal learning centres in which TAFE is involved and TAFE non-vocational courses to discover their effectiveness as bridges into employment or more formal education.**

If research shows that these are effective in meeting needs, then a strong case can be made for funding to be made more secure to enable experienced staff to have security and to be able to plan and prepare for future programs.

A woman in a very isolated NSW community wrote:

*'TAFE should do studies in rural areas and find out who is interested in what. There are a lot of very intelligent and gifted women around Cassilis and any course held here eg art, sewing, spinning have all been well supported. It is because these women live too far from a larger centre to travel and are most grateful if anything is held in Cassilis. The women can' travel great distances because of cost, time and childminding problems.'*

It is important to provide mature aged women returning to study with a choice of whether they wish to have a formal

assessment to see if they meet set standards or whether they would prefer a less threatening environment. Women often prefer the first - in a Queensland access course for women there was:

> no formal assessment, the award for it was limited to that of 'Statement of Attendance'. All (65) students felt this did not reflect the effort put into the course. They were very disappointed in receiving only a 'piece of paper' which simply stated that they had attended a trade-based course.[15]

This raises the issue of using methods of assessment which are less threatening to students than the traditional paper and pencil examination held under examination conditions but which do reflect more than mere attendance. Less stressful and more valid methods exists (such as continuous assessment, compiling portfolios and self assessment) and should be used more extensively throughout TAFE.

The South Australian Department of TAFE is concerned that decisions about educational structures, based on apparently objective criteria, can lead to gender-differentiated outcomes. It wishes to preserve and strengthen women's access programs by giving status in relevant TAFE and higher education awards for successful completion of these programs. The department wisely recognises that for some less confident women, courses which must meet certain standards could be threatening, and suggests these courses could be two-tiered.[16]

North Island College in Canada is an example of a successful community-based college. It is able to meet most of the educational needs of the adults in its region of 80 000 square kilometres. This college could well serve as a model for others which wish to improve their provision for isolated rural people. It aims to make the same learning materials and facilities available to all students, no matter how geographically isolated, while maximising contact between the students and between students and tutors.

> To maximise learning and training opportunities throughout the college region, North Island College uses a regionally-responsive distributed open-learning system. The key characteristics of this system are:
>
> - continuous entry/exit to most courses 12 months per year via registration at 19 local learning centres distributed throughout the region;
> - access to most courses via independent self-paced learning methods and materials supported by tutors on duty in the 19 local learning centres;
> - regular classes or optional-paced tutorial groups for many courses;

- extensive use of technology in learning including videotapes, audiotapes, microcomputers, TV broadcast support, computer-assisted instruction.

North Island College students can take their courses in various ways:

- with tutor leading a class or 'paced group' of students through the learning materials in person at the local learning centres or via TV;

- as self-paced independent learners at home with or without tutorial help, and visits to the local learning centre as required;

- working independently at the local learning centre using the library and audio-visual support systems as well as tutor help;

- for vocational or technical courses, self-paced learning through the theory portion of a course together with extensive training and practicals in classroom and group settings with instructors and tutors in the lab-oriented courses (physics, Chemistry, Biology, Nursing), in welding training, Office Administration (business machines) and hospitality/tourism training (cook training).[17]

North Island College has an open admission policy. College courses and facilities are freely accessible to all adults in the community, regardless of educational background, location or work patterns. Fees are charged for all courses ($32 Canadian per unit course) but senior citizens are not charged. There is no minimum educational requirement except for specific professional retraining programs.

A full year of university transfer courses (15 units) through the college, costs approximately half of the equivalent cost at a university. It is possible to complete university degree programs through a highly developed system of credit transfer with all universities in the province and with other off-campus universities in Canada.

The college operates all year and open scheduling of most courses means that students can start at any time. Students proceed at their own rate, although they are expected to complete most courses in six months and actually take out a contract to do so. This flexibility in timing can be particularly important to rural people, many of whom are seasonal workers.

Most of North Island's learning centres mail out catalogues several times a year to all households in their region. The learning centres, seven of which are regional, also encourage participation by their decentralisation and their physical integration with the local community.

All the learning centres have the same courses and facilities which include: study and meeting rooms, reference and videotape library, facilities for audio, video and satellite, micro computers and terminals and office machinery. Learning facilities are also available in numerous 'sub-centres' in small communities throughout the region. All students within the region have access to a centre or can make contact by a local telephone call. In this way, despite problems of isolation, the college is well and truly a part of the community.

The college has made a particular effort to be physically integrated into the communities. Learning centres are as close as possible to the hub of each community. Money has been spent on equipment and services rather than on buildings. For example, one learning centre is in an ex-supermarket, located on one of the busiest crossroads in town. Students enrolled in open courses can use the centre at any time until 9 pm.

There are also classroom facilities for viewing programs in a group. Scheduled classroom instruction takes place in the learning centres and, where there are a number of students enrolled in the same course at the same time, small group tutorials are held. There is always at least one tutor on duty at a learning centre and students are expected to consult them. Students are also encouraged to hold their own meetings.

The college regards the personal contact between student and tutor as an important aid to learning. A great deal of thought and ingenuity and considerable resources have been used to make this contact available to more isolated students. The college relies heavily on commercially published materials or packages from other educational institutions to reduce costs. Tutors work basically as learning facilitators, helping students identify and solve learning problems rather than providing answers for them. This means they can help students in all subject areas referring to subject experts when the need arises.[18]

An isolated woman in South Australia wrote:

*'With some experience with FAX and the direct system, I feel very positive about TAFE education. Again, studying by yourself does require an enormous amount of commitment, and often isolation, and I still have this bitter foreboding - WHAT FOR?! with a consequent lack of direction in how I can make positive changes.'*

This letter underlines the need for support for isolated rural women undertaking distance education.

In Australia, there has been little development of learning or study centres which make available professionally qualified support persons to help students by providing:

. assistance with applications for enrolment;
  . course counselling - assistance should be available for course selection and advice on study;
  . tutorial service in consultation with the providing institutions where the numbers of students warrant it (included in this should be the arrangement of lectures through the telecommunications network using an electronic classroom and interactive television);
  . the organisation of the provision of higher education courses under contract;
  . library services;
  . computing facilities;
  . examination services.[19]

However, it is likely that in more sparsely populated regions, the learning centre model could not reach all women.

Another successful model is the East Gippsland Rural Women's Program which has special funding for a co-ordinator to travel several times during the course to small outlying groups in the area to conduct tutorials and monitor students' progress. The program is designed to adapt to the wide age range of the students and their geographic isolation. The course is self-directed, based upon the needs and initiative of the students, with assistance from the co-ordinator.

More isolated women will need to rely on other learning support such as facsimile and teletutoring, interactive audio-video computer aided learning and institution-based centres such as the Victorian TAFE Off-Campus Network.

Rural women need to be made aware that face-to-face learning, which may be the only mode they have experienced, is not feasible in sparsely populated, remote areas. They must also be made aware that high quality alternatives exist which they can learn to use and so become independent learners. To facilitate this, it is recommended that:

. **All TAFE colleges ensure that a complete listing of their externally offered courses be available on a readily accessible data base.**

The Western Australian Division of TAFE lists all external courses this way, alphabetically by both course and subject area. It would be logical to follow this successful model nationally. This would then mean that anyone could find out

what is available from anywhere in Australia. It would mean unnecessary and expensive duplication of programs could be avoided and students could then use courses from any TAFE institution in Australia, with the considerable savings in costs which follow from such large scale provision. When students wished to study a program available from a different TAFE authority, the student's own authority could be charged the costs involved.

The Minister for Primary Industries and Energy has promised that information about training and education available to rural people will be compiled and made accessible, possibly as a data base in local libraries or through a dial-up computer network.[20] It is crucial that all relevant TAFE courses are included in this.

TSN11 is a satellite-based interactive communications network (viewers can telephone in) operating nationally from Queensland. Although it is no longer part of the TAFE system, it carries many TAFE programs. It is not limited by distance and can easily be linked to other communications systems including central databases, microcomputers and electronic mailing, many of which are used on modern, isolated properties.

Most clubs and hotels have receiving dishes and many rural people are able to access some programs through these. Over 2,000 rural homes have satellite receiving dishes and some councils have installed them for public use. Isisford Shire Council has installed a number of dishes so that anyone living in the district has access to satellite programs.

*'A woman on an isolated property at Clairmont with her own receiving dish arranged her weekly tennis morning, to which friends drove for up to three hours, to coincide with a TAFE program so the group of women could watch it together.'*

Satellite is an extremely cost efficient way of delivering programs to isolated rural women. However, there are as yet no TSN11 courses specifically designed for women although it is likely that many women are doing the general courses. There is considerable potential here for increasing isolated rural women's access to TAFE. That there is no women's advisor in Queensland TAFE may partially explain why this potential has not yet been realised. One of the major recommendations of the North Queensland Conference on Women and Work was that a female community development officer be appointed within TAFE.[21]

Western Australia has a rural co-ordinator scheme to identify needs in rural areas which uses local programs in three regional TAFE colleges and three independent community colleges (which provide many TAFE courses) and over one hundred TAFE rural centres. These offer very little specifically vocational training, concentrating instead on general interest and

enrichment courses. Western Australia has mobile training units in some country areas, but unfortunately these are used only in the male dominated trades areas. These limitations may reflect the fact that Western Australia has no women's access co-ordinators outside the metropolitan area. The need for women's courses is clear, and it is not uncommon for women to drive two or three hours each way to attend a weekly class. It is therefore recommended that:

- **A women's access co-ordinator be appointed in each country region nationally to facilitate rural women's access to TAFE.**

There is a well developed system of contracting the first year of higher education courses through the six regional colleges in Western Australia. In other states, contracting occurs but varies from college to college. The integration of various levels of education in country areas where resources and providers are more limited is a very important way of increasing isolated rural women's access to tertiary education. Having succeeded in their first year of higher education, isolated rural women are more likely to develop the confidence and motivation to complete their studies in a larger centre. However, many are unable to do so for family reasons or because of commitments on the farm. It is hoped that the contracting of these courses can be extended to later years to allow students to complete their higher education through the regional TAFE colleges, using modern communications technology such as teletutorials combined with facsimile machines. In the meantime, preference in contracting should be given to courses which are available by external study or which in other ways are accessible to isolated rural women.

However, modern technology with telephone connections does not, by itself, meet women's need for support in education. In evaluating a distance education course they had completed, NSW rural women had concerns about telephone contact and teletutorials:

- many seemed reluctant to ring because of 'cost', and because they might be 'disturbing the teacher';
- many seemed unsure of the efficacy of telephone contact as a teaching/learning method. ('Don't know if they could explain (to lecturers) on the phone, and you never know if you can get through to them. If I was stuck I would ring one of the other girls or the tutor');
- most would prefer face-to-face contact with teachers or tutors;
- some thought it would be difficult to explain diagrams over the phone;

- others argued that some questions are hard to put on paper, in which case phone conversations might be easier, and the problem of travel to attend face-to-face classes would also be obviated.[22]

All the women in this program considered that periodic face-to-face contact with each other and the lecturers was important and many were keen to continue the tutorials as study groups after the formal program finished.

NSW TAFE has 102 colleges, 73 of which are located outside the Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong area. There are 236 small centres linked to these and 183 of these offered courses in 1986. In 1986, in NSW over 550 TAFE courses were taught in rural areas and almost one third of all NSW TAFE students had rural addresses. This is a greater percentage than that of the rural students enrolled in the NSW External Studies College of TAFE (29%). On average in 1986, women made up less than 5% of total enrolments in certificate level courses offered through distance education by the college.[23] In 1988 in Western Australia, only 359 women, as opposed to 748 men who live outside the metropolitan area, were enrolled in TAFE external studies (of a total of 2621 enrolments). Clearly these must be a greater effort to respond to rural women's needs and to make rural women aware of what is available.

A Women's Co-ordination Unit was set up at the NSW External Studies College and aimed to:

- ensure that traditionally female areas were of an adequate standard;
- review course information in non-traditional areas and ensure it was 'woman friendly';
- modify trade and technical courses in which women were underrepresented and make them more appropriate for women;
- ensure external delivery mechanisms were set up to meet women's particular needs such as the provision of tutorials and practical workshops in communities;
- encourage group enrolments or clustering of students;
- conduct staff development activities to encourage the External Studies College staff to be aware of, and address, the special needs of women;
- ensure women enrolling in these courses did so on the basis of sound course information and vocational counselling.[24]

While not all of these aims could be met during the two years the unit operated, they form a model for TAFE External Studies providers trying to increase isolated rural women's access to TAFE.

TAFE in NSW uses mobile training units to increase the access of more isolated rural people. In extremely isolated areas, it provides weekend workshops. To help isolated women TAFE may work in conjunction with other institutions, eg in Tilpa in the far west of NSW, classes were organised - to coincide with the visits of the mobile toy library and child-care was arranged.

The Women's Access Program at Albury-Wodonga has a successful approach to child-care.[25] They applied for and received funding from the Community Employment Program for funding for a team of mobile child-carers, on-site at a variety of locations while mothers attend classes. For many of the mothers this was their first experience of leaving their children and others had no alternative child-care. Its provision was the key to many women's ability to attend classes. One discussion group stated simply:

*'we would not be here except for the free child-care.'*

In 1986, Queensland TAFE ran an access course for women, called 'Introduction to Trades and Technical Skills' in seven colleges, five of them in rural areas. This course provided experience in technical and trade areas and developed the students' communication and self-confidence. A lot of support was provided, mainly through a female co-ordinator whose duties included:

- being available each day;
- going into classes with students;
- personal and group counselling;
- accompanying students on visits;
- monitoring student progress;
- organising staff meetings to discuss student progress, problems and issues arising;
- visiting students on work experience.[26]

Extensive professional development for staff was provided prior to, and during, the course for all college staff involved in the program: senior staff, teaching staff and ancillary staff.

This support was thought necessary because of:

- negative attitudes towards women in trades from society in general, eg parents, husbands, boyfriends, relatives, employers, college staff;

- myths regarding the abilities of females to work efficiently in technical and trade areas;

- low self-esteem of women in general, influencing decisions to enter/remain in the course;

- the possibility of personality conflicts between staff and student(s) and student and student;
- lack of female trade teacher role models in colleges.[27]

The women doing this course were asked:[28]

| | Yes very much so | Yes, to some extent | Yes, a little | No not at all |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Do you think the course has improved your chances of getting a job? | 24 | 21 | 13 | 2 |
| Have you gained personally from the practical skills learned? | 33 | 25 | 2 | |
| Were you aware of the existence of trade-based pre-vocational courses before you started this course? | | 25 | 33 | 3 |

Clearly most students felt they had benefited very much from doing the course and were now much more aware of training opportunities in non-traditional areas. In this way, their career choices had widened. The women also reported that their self-esteem and confidence were raised and this would also benefit their career chances.

Of the sixty-five women who completed this course, more than half went on to a non-traditional, trade-related course or job and only nine returned to traditional female occupations.

Before starting the course, almost all the women were unemployed, but after it only four were not working. One of the lecturers described the effects of the course:

*'Students blossomed and gained in confidence with the realization that 'it's OK' to be female and interested in non-traditional areas. It was excellent, given their inexperience, to see the quality of the jobs they turned out.'*[29]

If women's participation in post-secondary education is to increase, educational institutions will need the flexibility to adapt to women's needs in both content and delivery of their courses. Curricula specially designed to incorporate women's life experiences have been very successful in women's learning.[30] For example theoretical examples in maths and science can be explained using examples relevant to women. To make TAFE more relevant to women it is recommended that:

- **All TAFE curricula, as a precondition for accreditation or reaccreditation, be made gender inclusive and reflect women's and men's needs in both content and delivery.**

*'Wendy married young and has never attended high school. Now that her children are adult, she would like to get a job. Lack of confidence made Wendy very hesitant about coming to the Return to Study Course for Women at Orbost in the far east of Victoria. However, both the teacher and her daughter persuaded her to try. In the supportive environment of the group she became more confident and willing to undertake projects. Her work was excellent. Having completed the course, she now plans to do a four years external course for a diploma in welfare studies at Gippsland Institute. There is a demand for people with this qualification in Orbost so she is very likely to get a good job.'*

Barbara Pocock[31] has looked at vocational education for women in Australia, England, Sweden and Germany. She considers that for women to benefit from this training, TAFE will need to plan and co-ordinate systematically for women in the selection and professional development of lecturers and administrators, the provision of equipment and training facilities , in child-care, and in sustained effort to ensure that women's needs and preferred learning styles are given equal consideration with men's. One of the co-ordinators of TAFE programs for isolated rural women commented on the limited availability of courses which are appropriate for isolated rural women. She insisted that TAFE should be placing more emphasis on meeting people's needs and less on providing what TAFE staff may wish to provide.[32] The Commonwealth Working Party on Post-Secondary Rural Education strongly recommended a regional co-operative approach in delivering tertiary education in rural areas, with priority for courses directly relevant to the local community and local community needs.[33]

Community involvement in all stages of the course is essential if TAFE is to meet the needs of rural women. Delegates from community organisations such as the Country Women's Association should be invited to participate in all important stages of the program from selecting the target group and the course through to decisions on relevant content to the final evaluation. To achieve this it is recommended that:

- **When courses are provided for rural communities, representatives of those communities participate in all significant decisions about the content, delivery, venue and (when appropriate) staffing of the program.**

It is important to get information about courses to the target group. Generally this is achieved more successfully by using a variety of means such as: community groups like the Country Women's Association; the Parents of Isolated Children; school or kindergarten newsletters; notices in shops; the local press, television and radio (some have a free community information service); the CES; churches; and sports and service clubs. Special groups can be informed via migrant organisations, ethnic radio, social services, hospitals and district nurses.

In South Australia, a series of fifteen women's seminars were held in rural areas, attracting approximately 800 participants. They were jointly sponsored by TAFE and the Department of Agriculture. Both used their extensive contacts to publicise the seminars. Excellent media coverage was obtained in the local press and radio. School newspapers were also a very effective means of reaching families. Child-care was provided. Community involvement from the planning stage onwards, was a key factor in its success - a small local committee for each determined the content, time table, venue and catering. Each committee member was given responsibility for publicising the seminars by distributing pamphlets. This involvement made the local women feel that this program was truly theirs.[34]

> The Working Party on Post-Secondary Rural Education believes that many deficiencies in the delivery of rural education are linked to the fact that insufficient resources are devoted to marketing courses so that rural people have appropriate information to make sound educational choices. Institutions should increase the proportion of their resources spent on marketing and this should include the development of (higher education's) links with TAFE and schools and credit transfer arrangements.[35]

Whether child-care is provided often determines women's access to classes.

*'Without child care, we wouldn't be here.'*

*'My child benefits as much from being with the other children in the creche as I do from the class - we both look forward to Wednesday mornings.'*

Small country colleges and centres often do not have their own child-care facilities and in these communities there is less likelihood of occasional day-care being available. Mobile child-care can be very difficult to arrange on a day per week or similar basis and it can be difficult to find a suitable venue. Two solutions which have succeeded for rural women's groups are mobile child-care, which is brought to a venue adjacent to the program, and family day-care.

The Benalla Farm Gate Learning group in Victoria was active in lobbying for family day-care to be established in their district. The scheme was accepted by Benalla City and Shire and a co-ordinator appointed.[36]

Twelve years ago, UNESCO was urging those providing adult education to add the following to locally-based provision:

- distance education using print and communications technology;
- mobile classrooms;
- self-learning programs;
- study groups;
- voluntary tutors;
- use of public facilities such as libraries.

It also stated that one aim of adult education in rural areas should be to end the isolation of individuals or groups.[37] All of these are being provided in some programs in some areas. It is surely time that far more rural women gained access to TAFE through these means.

An important note of caution is worth repeating here:

> Despite our forever push to use new technologies, there is still considerable room for improvement in the use of existing technologies like the telephone, audio and video tape. New technology will not overcome fundamentally bad delivery and it may well make it worse.[38]

NOTES

1. Rural Development Centre (1987). The post-secondary education needs of rural Australians. Final report to the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission. Canberra: AGPS (page 70).

2. Ramsey, G. (1987). 'What tertiary education institutions can do to provide for the educational needs of non-metropolitan women'. Draft paper to the Seminar on Women in Agriculture at Muresk Agricultural College division of Curtin University, WA. 24 September 1987.

3. Campbell, L. (1988). 'Skills for rural women - an educational challenge'. Paper given at Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Areas Conference, Tasmania, 3 July 1988.

4. Campbell, L., above.

5. Brady, W. (1987). Women's studies program for rural women. Women's interests and curriculum research and development. Western Australia. TAFE.

6. Benalla Forum Inc. (1988). Farm gate learning. Victoria: Benalla Forum Inc. (page 64).

7. Campbell, L., above.

8. Hewitt, P. (1987). 'TAFE in rural NSW'. Paper presented at the Society for the Provision of Rural Education in Australia, 3rd Annual Conference, 11-14 July 1987.

9. Knowles, M. (1979). The adult learner: a neglected species. Texas USA: Gulf Publishing Company.

10. Kerin, J. (1988). Address to the national conference of the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia. Launceston, Tasmania 4 July 1988.

11. Grayden, C. (1987). Delivery of TAFE programs in rural areas by community based providers. Victoria: Technical and Further Education.

12. South East College of TAFE Learning Centre Network. (1988). New opportunities for rural women: a pilot distance education programme. South Australia: South East College of TAFE.

13. South East College of TAFE Learning Centre Network, above.

14. Pocock, B. (1987). Changing systems: women's access to work and TAFE. Canberra: AGPS.

15. Department of Education, Queensland. (1987). Your new direction: introduction to trades and technical skills for women. Queensland: Technical and Further Education. (page 68).

16. South Australian Department of TAFE. (1988). TAFE response to State Green Paper. Mimeograph 14 March, 1988.

17. Kenworthy, B. (1988). North Island College Report. (Roneo): Adelaide: Adelaide College of TAFE, pages 2-3.

18. - adaption of paper above.

19. Parkinson, K. (1987). The delivery of TAFE services to people in remote areas - a case study with generalisations. Adelaide: TAFE National Centre for Research and Development. (page 83)

20. Kerin, J., above.

21. Proceedings of the North Queensland Conference (1986). Women and work. Canberra: AGPS, 15 May, 1986.

22. Richards, W. (1987). Distance into evaluation: summary of major findings. Draft report. NSW: Department of TAFE, p.4.

23. Women's Coordination Unit NSW TAFE (1986). Development of external studies learning materials, some propositions developed for meeting on Wednesday 16 July 1986.

24. Women's Coordination Unit, above.

25. La Nauze, H. (1985). Women's access to learning in Albury-Wodonga. Albury-Wodonga: Continuing Education Centre.

26. Department of Education, Queensland, above, p.26.

27. Department of Education, Queensland, above, p.27.

28. Department of Education, Queensland, above, p.70.

29. Department of Education, Queensland, above, p.48.

30. Pocock, B., above.

31. Pocock, B. (1987). Man-made skill: women challenging the tradition in England, Sweden and Germany. Adelaide: TAFE National Centre for Research and Development. (A study of some overseas initiatives to increase women's access to paid work.)

32. Burns, Wendy. Lecturer in Access, Naracoorte College of TAFE, SA. Personal correspondence.

33. Ramsey, G., above.

34. Penniment, Dianna. Chairperson, SA Rural Advisory Council. Personal correspondence.

35. Ramsey, G., above, p.14.

36. Benalla Forum Inc. (1988). Farm gate learning. Victoria: Benalla Forum Inc.

37. UNESCO (1976). Recommendation on the development of adult education, adopted by the General Conference at its nineteenth session, Nairobi, 26 November 1976.

38. Ramsey, G., above, page 13.

## 7. THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF SPECIAL GROUPS OF RURAL WOMEN

Many of the issues discussed in this chapter also apply to other groups, such as all women, or indeed in some cases to all adults, who belong to special groups. This project is limited to the needs of mature aged, isolated, rural women and so discussion is limited to them. This in no way is meant to suggest that the issues apply only to them. Similarly, the courses which are described illustrate particular issues, and it is understood that other courses may be achieving excellent results in different ways.

There are a number of groups of isolated rural mature age women who have special needs. The Rural Development Centre[1] listed these as:

- migrant women
- single mothers
- Aboriginal women
- unemployed women
- women in single industry communities.

Clearly, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Handicapped women could also be added to this list. Many Aboriginal women are in isolated rural areas so their access to TAFE forms a separate chapter of this report. The Rural Development Centre points out that:

> there are many factors operating in the lives of these women which compound the educational disadvantage ... of rural women.[2]

Isolated rural women who belong to any of these special groups may have problems in doing TAFE courses which are compounded when the problems of isolated rural women are combined with those of the special group. Some of their problems are considered in reports, policy and programs developed for the special group, or for isolated rural women. However their small numbers and the fact that they tend to be anything but clamorous in seeking their rights means that little direct attention has been given to their needs for post-compulsory education.

Some women fall into more than one special category and their disadvantage may be compounded by the interaction of a number of factors. For example it was pointed out by lecturers in one Western Australian mining town that Asian women who have recently come to Australia to marry Australians are treated badly by other women in this town and virtually ostracised socially. The town itself is very male dominated and the Asian brides have been left in no doubt that their place is 'at the bottom of the ladder'. Courses run for migrant women must do far more than just teach English, they must teach them about Australian life and help develop their self esteem, while providing them with skills (such as driving) which are relevant to employment and which can increase their confidence and independence.

*'Maria and Suzie are Thai women who came to isolated properties in Victoria to marry much older Australian farmers. Both are now widowed with young children. They have had to leave their properties and are now sharing a home and their resources in a small country town. Their future looks bleak.'*

As many Asian brides are marrying considerably older men, it is likely that many will be widowed, often with dependant children, while living on isolated properties. As we can anticipate that Maria and Suzie's story will be repeated many times in the future it is very important that these women be given training now to help them to cope with Australian society and practices and to prepare them to manage independently should this become necessary. Courses in Australian farming techniques may be particularly useful.

As with any group, isolated rural communities include some handicapped people. TAFE lecturers report that often these people are supported and protected by their families but that this can mean that they are very isolated and have little opportunity for wider social contact or for exploring their own potential. Many would have great difficulty in getting to TAFE classes unless transport is arranged. Research for this paper included a literature search, and discussions with TAFE lecturers and co-ordinators both of which suggest that little is being done to help handicapped people's access to TAFE in rural Australia compared to the help provided in urban Australia. The Department of Community Services and Health claims that despite considerable activity in this area, existing training systems including TAFE are in general not meeting the vocational and non-vocational needs of handicapped people:

> Basically disability is an ad hoc, poorly resourced, low priority issue, in which performance is unable to match the rhetoric of the TAFE policy documents... It will therefore be necessary to identify how TAFE can meet its obligations to people with disabilities within the context of its overall obligations, and in

> particular to consider realistic budgetary strategies which will raise the priority of disability issues from its current ad hoc response to a clear, predictable and adequate meeting of needs[3].

Despite this, the above report states that 1.4% of the total TAFE enrolments are people with disabilities. This indicates that TAFE has an important role to play in providing education to handicapped adults:

> studies. . . have established that there are un-met needs which TAFE could address.[4]

We have no way of knowing how many handicapped rural women are enrolled in external studies however it is likely that external studies is going some way towards meeting their needs. Disabled students often need social skills training. Also some modes of external studies provision are inappropriate for certain disabilities, for example hearing impaired students may require language development before they can benefit from mainstream written course material. Language development deficiencies in deaf people create problems for educators of deaf adults, particularly those providing basic skills education. Educators must understand this problem if they are to provide services to this group.

Larson [5] discusses the literature on attitudinal factors associated with educating adults with disabilities. Numerous authors have found that the greatest problem facing the handicapped is lack of social interaction with the general community. He found that other people tend to consider disabled people are more handicapped than is in fact the case, and to think of the physically disabled (including the blind and deaf) as being mentally deficient when they are not. Those prejudices can lead to discrimination against the disabled. This has implications for access. TAFE staff need to learn to deal with people with disabilities. Educators who are trying to integrate the handicapped into mainstream courses need to be sensitive to those prejudicial tendencies and to find ways to overcome them. Successful integration of disabled people into regular classes has the extra potential benefit of reducing community prejudice towards the disabled. Larson stresses the need felt by the disabled to increase their dignity, freedom and control over their personal destinies.

Transport is often a critical issue in disabled people's access to TAFE, particularly so in isolated rural areas. Organised car pooling, use of community buses or writing transportation costs into the course funding are means which have been used to overcome this barrier.

Single mothers face particular problems in accessing TAFE. Often they have very low incomes and may have problems paying the costs involved such as stationery, transport and fees. As well, they may need child-care. They may only be able to attend when a creche is provided or a course is run during school hours.

*'Janice is a supporting parent who lives 100 kilometres from the nearest TAFE college. When a course on communications and developing self-esteem was provided locally, Janice was at last able to attend a TAFE course. She received a great deal of support from the women in the class; as she lives in an isolated area she had not previously linked into a supportive network. Her self-confidence grew and she felt able to understand and evaluate her life and plan for her future. Janice has now started the Rural Office Practice Course which is very accessible, being held in the local school and serviced by TAFE.'*

The change in government provision for supporting mothers means that they are no longer eligible for a pension when their youngest child reaches sixteen. These women who are now in their thirties and forties are being forced to compete with teenagers for the few jobs available in country communities. To get unemployment benefits they must have the signature of employers to whom they have applied for work. This is humiliating as most people in small communities know each other. Many women in this group are now looking to TAFE to provide them with the skills, support and confidence they need if they are to return to the workforce.

*'A year after Linda's husband deserted her and their two children she was still very depressed and lacked the confidence to plan or prepare for her future. Friends encouraged her to enrol in a NOW (New Opportunities for Women) course and she "blossomed", becoming more confident and consequently happier. Her self-esteem grew and she was delighted to find herself able to make important decisions and to begin to a new life.'*

Women who live in isolated single industry communities or company towns are another group who needs special consideration. Often these women and their families move from one mine to another every few years and so lack support networks of long term friends and extended family. Often mining towns have only one major employer and a very limited range of occupations for women. The costs of building can be very high and this can be a deterrent for those wishing to start their own business. Some company towns offer very good social/recreational facilities but others, particularly in depressed areas, offer little and the women can become very lonely and lose confidence. Where the mining industry is depressed many women are anxious to acquire skills which will enable them to supplement the family income.

A New South Wales college principal with experience in a number of coal mining communities pointed out that until legislation passed in 1982 mining companies used to put off women when they married. This attitude that married women should not work is still prevalent in many older mining communities. Often the company is the major employer in the community and most employment is in traditional male areas. These factors make it very difficult for women, particularly married women, to obtain work in these communities and many are looking to TAFE to provide them with skills which they can use to increase their income.

Migrant women also require particular consideration from TAFE, as they may be isolated by language and custom from whatever local community exists in their area. Many migrant women are illiterate in English, and some are illiterate in their native languages. Even well-educated migrant women can be very isolated in rural communities and TAFE may be able to help them overcome some of the obstacles which prevent them taking a more active role in the Australian economy and society.

*'Rosa is a Columbian married to an Australian geologist and has lived for two years in a remote West Australian mining town. Although she has a degree from Columbia she needed help in practising her English. She felt frustrated that she could not work as an interpreter but lacked the confidence to sit the necessary examination in English. Rosa did a TAFE course in communications and passing an Australian accredited examination in it gave her the confidence to undertake the interpreter's examination. This means she can now be employed in her chosen area.'*

The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia Inc. has urged the government to set up more bridging courses for women who have obtained their qualifications overseas.[6]

Students who come from different cultural backgrounds have different ways of learning and behaving in the classroom. Asian students have often been taught to go to great effort in presenting their work well, Aboriginal culture encourages sharing with the group rather than individual effort. These ways of behaving may not be valued by some teachers and this can damage a woman's self-esteem and limit her potential as a student.

The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia Inc. urges (1986) that those providing services to migrant women be given appropriate pre-service and in-service training to develop their cross-cultural sensitivity. The federation recommends that programs for migrant women be made linguistically and culturally appropriate by involving community based organisations, providing information and services in languages other than English, and by providing flexible, co-ordinated and continuously evaluated programs and services.

A distance learning program in listening, reading, writing and speaking English which is meeting a real need among migrant women nationally has been developed by Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) and funded by the Department of Immigration. It can be used by any migrant who can read Roman script, has access to a telephone and a cassette player and can pay the fees. It is available in stages of graded levels of difficulty, from that for a non-English speaker to a level at which a person could, with support, do a TAFE mainstream course. Each stage costs $25 and consists of a number of booklets with self-correcting worksheets, plus cassette tapes. Students ring a 008 number to practise their skills at certain points in the program.

*'About two hundred and fifty kilometres from Darwin is a small very isolated settlement of pearl fishermen. There is only one woman living there, the Japanese wife of one of the divers. She has been in Australia just over a year. She had studied English at school but found it extremely difficult to understand Australian accents. She was lonely and losing her confidence as there are very few Japanese speakers in the community. She has been doing the Department of Immigration's course for several months, and is able to meet with teachers at the Adult Migrant Education Centre when she visits Darwin about once a month. Now she is able to communicate far better with native English speakers and her self-esteem and confidence have grown markedly.'*

However there are some problems in using this program with very isolated women. AMES in the Northern Territory explained that many of their students have very low levels of English and find it too difficult to do this course without initial face-to-face support. The program is more successful with those who have greater competency in English, but, even then, a meeting with a tutor is very helpful. Also it does not directly overcome the problem of the women's social isolation. In some states such as South Australia the program is sometimes used in conjunction with a volunteer tutor, which has been most successful. The cost, $25 per stage, while it is only a token contribution towards the cost of the program, nevertheless could create problems for some women (such as refugees or other women who have very little access to money). Lecturers have described cases where women have been unable to enrol as their husbands would not give them the $25. TAFE staff who interviewed the couples felt that in some of these cases the husbands, who spoke English, preferred to restrict the women's access to English lessons, as this gave them more control and power over their wives.

It is quite common for migrant families (and not at all unusual for other families) to regard TAFE as a male institution, inappropriate, or irrelevant to, respectable women. Visits by TAFE staff to the homes of members of special groups give all

involved a chance to discuss any concerns they may have and to correct any misunderstandings or fears about the course. Visits create a link so that it is easier for the student and her family members to approach the lecturer, rather than the student withdrawing, should problems arise during the course.

Meeting with the students' families also helps the lecturer to learn about, and have a deeper understanding of, the students' needs, and to plan an appropriate course in consultation with them. Informal social gatherings which included the students' families before and during a course held in a desert region of Western Australia reassured the students and their families as well as promoting friendship among class members.

Migrant women from some cultures may not go out of their homes freely or make their own way to classes or meetings. Some are not allowed (by their families) to drive or to use public transport, and some may not travel alone. Some would not be allowed to join a class which included men, or even had male visiting lecturers. The Rural Development Centre points out that:

> ...attempts to encourage migrant women's participation in post-secondary education have been made difficult by their husbands' reluctance to have them leave the home or farm. . .[8]

This indicates that the needs of migrant women cannot be met if the women are viewed out of the context of their families. Mageean and Linke[9] found that when TAFE staff met with the families of female migrant and refugee students there was greater success in terms of enrolment rates and student participation in extra-mural activities, including work experience.

O'Connell[10] found rural migrant women's greatest needs were to get out of their homes for a few hours to mix with other women and to do English lessons, particularly English for driving and for running a small business. However it is very difficult for TAFE to meet these needs in isolated places as the migrant women are often spread thinly through sparsely populated areas. Finding interpreters in isolated areas can also be extremely difficult. A number of TAFE lecturers have commented on the very helpful service provided by the Commonwealth Telephone Interpreter Service.

One successful course for migrant women has been run since 1986 at Goulburn Valley College of TAFE, Victoria. The group includes women from the town and outlying properties who are brought to the college in the community bus. The cost of transport to and from the college was written into the submission and has proved invaluable[11]. The class has

been designed to fit in with school hours and holidays as most of the women with school aged children would not otherwise have been able (or allowed by their husbands) to attend.

*'Theodora, Madelaine and Ourania are Greek ladies in their fifties and sixties living on rural properties in the Goulburn Valley. Without the pick-up service of the community bus they would not have been able to attend the course. In fact until doing this course each one's social contacts had been restricted to irregular attendance at church. They have now all gained L-plates and are hoping to get their licences. This would never have occurred to them as a possibility before doing the course which provided not only instruction but support, and increased their self-confidence along with their English. Obtaining a licence would radically change these women's life styles as previously they were totally dependent on the male members of their families for transport on the rare occasions when they were able to leave the farm.'*

The program is designed to fit in with school hours - the women are picked up after 9.30 am and returned home by 3.30 pm. During school holidays classes are not run. One of the goals of the course is to increase the students' self confidence and encourage them to try new activities. At the same time it is vital not to offend traditional cultural values or the women might stop coming. Even a group visit to a bowling alley (during the day, with only women present) brought several phone calls from husbands who considered that this was unacceptable for respectable women.

Some of the women who were invited to join the group were not allowed to do so by their husbands or even their children as they feared that a women's group might teach feminism. A number of the husbands considered that a men's group would be more appropriate, despite the fact that TAFE already offers far more programs in traditional male areas.

Although very low cost child-care is available at this college the migrant women rarely use it, possibly because they fear that language and cultural differences could upset their children. Many mothers and grandmothers who had been approached to join the course were unable to do so or could not attend regularly because of child-care obligations.

Rural migrant women caring for young children often are unable to attend classes because there are no culturally/linguistically appropriate child-care facilities available. The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia Inc. recommends that tertiary institutions, such as TAFE, ensure that their courses reflect the multicultural

nature of Australian society and that child-care students be made aware of the language and other cultural needs of children from non-English speaking homes. The issue of child-care is discussed more fully in the chapter on the needs of isolated rural women.

All these restrictions on the access of special groups create difficulties in providing courses in urban areas, but it is much harder to organise classes and fulfil class size regulations in rural areas. Having to get together six or eight people for a special access course, such as for migrant women or for handicapped rural people, is often impossible in isolated areas, despite the need some individuals have for such courses.

If TAFE is to help migrant rural women, it should acknowledge and value these women's experiences, skills and values. Learning must be seen as a two way process in which the women are not only taught, but are also valued as contributors, of knowledge. One program which succeeded in doing this was a Multicultural Cooking Exchange run by the Country Women's Association in the Eastern Pilbara, WA. In each session a class member taught the group (of migrant and Anglo-Australian women) to cook a dish and at the end of the year a recipe book was printed and distributed. The migrant women learned about Australian weights and measures and improved their English literacy in a supportive environment. All the women widened their experience of other cultures and benefited from the social mixing. Each woman's experience was valued and her contribution sought, so increasing her feelings of self-esteem. A number of lasting cross-cultural friendships have developed between the women and also between the children who attended a creche during the sessions.

When a bus is available to bring people to and from home the access of special groups is greatly increased. Therefore it is recommended that:

- **Courses designed for isolated rural special access groups, or which have enrolled students from special access groups, be eligible for a special grant if this is needed to cover the cost of hiring transport for these students.**

Participation in non-compulsory education is related to the individual's self-esteem and sense of purpose. It is frequently stated that women as a group tend to underestimate their potential to succeed in education, for isolated rural women with special needs this problem is magnified. Those courses which have been most successful have been ones in which a supportive environment has been created and the women have participated at each stage of the

course, from decisions about what is to be covered, how and by whom, to the running of the program and its final evaluation. This involvement gives the participants ownership of the course, and enables them to recognise that they are capable of making decisions. It acknowledges and values the women's life experiences so that all involved are both teachers and learners.

So that ways of meeting the special needs of disadvantaged groups can be integrated into TAFE provision and to ensure sensitivity and appropriateness of services, it is recommended that:

- **Whenever programs are developed for isolated rural women, representatives from specially disadvantaged groups in the community to be served participate in decision making and be consulted at all relevant stages of the programs' design, development and operation.**

To assist lecturers and co-ordinators to respond sensitively to the needs of women from special groups, a series of monographs could be prepared in consultation with TAFE staff who have had long-term, successful experience with particular groups. These monographs would each contain information about a specific special group (eg Italian migrants, the deaf, supporting mothers) to aid in the provision of sensitive programs and appropriate support.

The monograhs could provide background information about the particular group, and discuss issues or problems members of the group might encounter while studying, and describe how these might be dealt with, plus any relevant legislation or special government provision. These monographs could be freely available to all TAFE lecturing staff nationally and placed in all college libraries. There is considerable material available but TAFE lecturing staff who might suddenly find they had students from special groups in their class probably would not have the time or resources to obtain and study it. Short, readable, and above all practical, information could be invaluable. Therefore it is recommended that:

- **A series of monographs be written to provide information for TAFE staff about the backgrounds and issues relevant to specific special groups and ways successful TAFE programs have approached these issues.**

Special efforts are also required to ensure that information about these programs reaches women in disadvantaged groups. Community radio and television and social services can be useful in this. Translating information into ethnic languages and broadcasting this over ethnic radio can help reach non-English speaking background women. The media and other means of information will require sensitivity to these groups when producing this.

TAFE lecturers who provide programs for women from specially disadvantaged groups will require pre-service and in-service professional development to ensure that the programs are appropriate for those groups and sensitive to their needs. Finding ways of overcoming this, providing essential support and liaising with potential employers, families and community organisations all require time and knowledge. To provide for this, it is recommended that:

- **Additional non-contact time for professional development, community liaison and support services be allocated to lecturers whose classes contain students from specially disadvantaged groups of isolated rural women.**

The Honorable Chris Hurford, (then) Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs [10] explained that the government believes that people who already are disadvantaged should not have that disadvantage compounded by restricted access to public services. Instead, all groups should be helped to realise their potential and to participate more actively in Australian society. Increasing access to, and equity in, education means greater responsibilities, obligations and challenges for providers such as TAFE.

NOTES

1. Rural Development Centre. (1987). The post-secondary education needs of rural Australians. Final report to the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission. Canberra: AGPS.

2. Rural Development Centre, above, page 26.

3. Department of Community Services and Health (1988). TAFE and people with disabilities. Canberra: AGPS, p. ix.

4. Walker, E. (1985). 'Access to TAFE for disabled persons.' in Issues in TAFE. Mountney, P. and Mageean, P. (1985). Adelaide: TAFE National Centre for Research and Development, p. 205.

5. Larson, G.A. (1982). Adult education for the handicapped. Ohio, USA: National Centre for Research in Vocational Education.

6. Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia Inc. (1986). Consultation with ethnic women on the National Agenda for Women. Discussion paper submitted to the Office of Status of Women. Sydney. 26 July 1986.

7. Mageean, P. and Linke, R. (1985). 'How can TAFE better assist students from non-English speaking homes? Suggestions by these students and their teachers' in Australian Journal of TAFE Research and Development. I(1). Adelaide: TAFE National Centre for Research and Development.

8. Rural Development Centre, above, p. 50.

9. Mageean, P. and Linke, R., above.

10. O'Connell, R. (1986). Migrant women's group. Victoria: Goulburn Valley College of TAFE.

11. O'Connell, above.

12. Hurford, C. (1986). Access and equity in the delivery of federal government services and programs to migrants. Report to Parliament. Roneo.

## 8. RURAL ABORIGINAL WOMEN AND TAFE[1]

Approximately 80% of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population live in rural or remote areas or towns of less than 100 000 people.

> No study of women in rural Australia would be complete if it did not address the special circumstances of Aboriginal and Islander women.[2]

Aboriginal women share the problems of all rural women when they wish to do further study. There may be the need to travel to a major centre and should they have to board there is the cost of accommodation, isolation from friends and family, and after possibly many years, problems of adjusting to study again. For Aboriginal women, these problems are compounded by race and class, and very little formal education. Many Aboriginal women have had minimal, if any, secondary schooling. Aboriginal participation in tertiary award courses is only about one-third that of non-Aborigines. The Australian Government is committed to a policy of increasing Aborigines' tertiary participation rates to the national average by the year 2000 and is pledged to provide improved opportunities in TAFE.[3] In today's society Aboriginal women have been deprived of their traditional role and economic functions and many are living in poverty, their average incomes being even lower than those of Aboriginal men although many are supporting children. Only 4% of Aboriginal women workers, irrespective of occupation, earned more than $10 000 per annum in 1986.

On Palm Island, of a Torres Strait Islander population of 2,300 and there are only 74 women employed, most of these are in low skilled jobs such as cleaners, packers or domestics. Aboriginal women find it frustrating when work which they could do in their communities, for example as secretaries, supervisors and kindergarten aides, is taken by non-Aboriginal women.[4]

Aboriginal women want courses which will help them to be more effective in their own communities so they can replace the non-Aboriginal administrators. They want to learn general office procedure, household budgeting and management. They want courses which will allow them to be more independent such as home maintenance, carpentry, sewing, building, making mud bricks or gardening to grow fresh food.[5] The women interviewed by the Aboriginal Women's Task Force were aware that their lack of education and qualifications contributed to their unemployment. They were enthusiastic about study, particularly if it could be provided in their own communities. Some women suggested mobile teaching units could visit outstations and homelands regularly, as do the mobile health units.

Interviews with Aboriginal women[6] all over Australia showed that Aboriginal women want to be taught how to establish and run their own group businesses, such as crafts or co-operatives. They need to know how to keep records and how to package goods they are selling. Most of all, the women want courses run for and by their own people, to have representation at all stages of developing the courses, and stronger efforts made to train Aboriginal people as lecturers and role models. It is recommended that:

- **Special efforts, including designated funding, be made to encourage Aboriginal women to lecture in, and contribute to, every stage of courses run for rural Aboriginal women.**

Given the opportunity, Aboriginal women have shown that they can succeed - they have been a major force in gaining better services for their people in health, education and broadcasting.[7] The outstanding achievements of some Aboriginal women in the professions, government, arts and voluntary organisations show the wealth of, as yet untapped, potential among Aboriginal women. Thousands of Aboriginal women are involved, at all levels and all over Australia, in community-based and community-controlled Aboriginal organisations.

Many Aboriginal women now want to continue their education. The highest demand comes from women over forty whose children have now grown (although many of these women are caring for grandchildren). These mature women provide excellent role models for younger people, especially girls who may be timid about doing further study. It is crucial that TAFE responds sensitively.

*'Mary was taken from her parents as a small child and raised on a mission where she was trained to be a domestic worker. While working on a country property, with her family grown up, she enrolled in an external TAFE access course. Her success in this course gave her the confidence to begin tertiary study and she is now in her late forties completing a child-care course at a College of Advanced Education.'*

Like other TAFE students, Aboriginal women's success partly depends upon their motivation. Many study to increase their job opportunities, while others want to improve the skills they use in their everyday lives. Often women reported[8] that study gave them the confidence to deal with government bureaucracy and officials, while others were pleased to be able to help their children with their school work. Whatever the goal, they are looking to TAFE to provide them with a means of becoming more independent and to gain higher self-esteem. It is a serious responsibility for TAFE.

Because of the close family networks generally found among Aborigines, many women are care-givers, looking after elderly parents or young children who may be their own and/or the children of relatives. Glenda Humes, the Director of the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Women, points out that single women who are not living in Aboriginal communities lack support networks and so have special needs. If they are to have access to courses, care will have to be provided for any young children or older people whom they are looking after.

Aboriginal women are largely responsible for passing on and preserving traditional culture. To be credible in the eyes of the younger generation they need to have dignity and self-respect - both of which are undermined by a system which keeps them dependent upon welfare. Senator Neville Bonner[9] speaks of a sense of loss and purposelessness among senior members of the community and the importance of restoring adults to positions of authority. Many courses for women aim to raise their feelings of self-esteem and power. By helping to make them more articulate and able to deal with government bureaucracy, adult education can assist them to gain increasing control over their own, and their community's, future.

*'Lily who lives in an isolated Western Australian mining community, was shy and withdrawn and unable to talk to non-Aboriginal people before she was persuaded to join a class. She was in her thirties with three school aged children, unemployed and saw herself as having no skills. With the support of the teacher and other students she "came out of her shell" and joined a National Employment Scheme for Aboriginals. She is now confident and articulate, doing voluntary social work, organising Aboriginal groups and speaking with politicians!'*

Aboriginal women want to do courses which will help them to become more independent of pensions and welfare. For example, at the Ceduna Campus of the Eyre Peninsula College of TAFE in South Australia, a most successful series of courses were run from August 1983 to December 1987. Aboriginal people were taught to establish and maintain market gardens and as a result a neglected and arid site which belongs to a local Aboriginal land trust at Poverty Flat has been converted into a very productive market garden. This success at Ceduna improved the relationship between the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities. Most of the approximately 70 students who did the course were women which was particularly acceptable to them as it complemented their traditional role as gatherers of food. At Ceduna Aboriginal unemployment is very high and the fact that a number of the graduates who had previously been unemployed got jobs was one of its successes. Some have continued to work at Poverty Flat while others have obtained other positions such as Aboriginal education officers.

The course was carefully integrated so that topics built upon each other. At Ceduna as well as gardening, students learned about nutrition and cooking. Students were able to provide their families with the produce they had grown and many reported that their families' health had improved as a result. Personal skills, maths, English and driver education were taught and work experience made available. The additional skill of obtaining a driver's licence was a huge step for many women; it gave them mobility and enhanced their confidence and self-esteem.

*'Jenny was a housewife with four children who had never been employed when she joined the market gardening class. She had always been interested in gardening and became a very active member of the class. On graduating Jenny obtained a job in the local garden centre, a private organisation. It is most unusual for an Aboriginal person to get such a job in Ceduna. When TAFE stopped running the courses she returned to work at Poverty Flat as one of a core group of Aboriginal women who have kept the enterprise going independently, and successfully. Jenny is now training other Aboriginal people in market gardening. The market garden is well accepted as a viable concern and source of high quality produce by the general community. Women such as Jenny have helped improve the status of Aboriginal women in the general community, and won its respect.'*

Daylight and Johnstone[10] found that the main reason why Aboriginal women want further education is to have more control over their own lives. This promotion of self-determination for Aborigines is one of the aims of the commonwealth's Aboriginal Employment Development Policy[12] The policy also aims to promote and enhance Aboriginal economic independence and to achieve equity consistent with Aboriginal social and cultural values. TAFE, as a provider of education for Aboriginal women, is one very important means of meeting those aims.

> Training and Education remain the outstanding issues when it comes to analysing progress towards authentic community, and self, management.[12]

Until very recently it was generally accepted by non-Aboriginal Australians that Aborigines were deficient in the skills and attributes which would allow them to adjust to, and assimilate into, mainstream, non-Aboriginal Australian middle-class culture. Education was therefore seen as a means of remedying this deficiency. Today there is much more appreciation of cultural diversity, and of the rights of Aborigines to decide their destiny for themselves. Education is one of the means by which people can identify for themselves how they wish to live their lives:

> Education can be a tool, a way to help identify and change the circumstances that create inequity and perpetuate disadvantage.[13]

Unless Aboriginal people are given control over adult education activities in their own communities, adult education is likely to become increasingly marginalised and irrelevant to the lives of those it purports to serve.[14] Adult education can assist in raising the consciousness of its students.

Aboriginal people repeatedly express their dissatisfaction with short courses which do not give a certificate or lead anywhere and which have so often been '<u>given to</u>' Aborigines. They want to be <u>part of the process</u> that determines what will be provided, by whom, and how. This was acknowledged by the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy[15] when he spoke of the need for rural people to be encouraged to participate more in post-school education through community involvement in defining, developing and managing their education at the local level.

As the needs of Aboriginal women will vary in different communities it is recommended that:

- **Before any course for isolated Aboriginal women is developed the views of the potential students be sought and used as the basis for determing what is to be offered, how and by whom.**

Valadian and McNamara[16] ten years ago showed that both urban and traditional Aborigines were progressing towards self-management by establishing town councils, social welfare organisations and services and administrative structures which reflect Aboriginal culture and values. This progress has continued but has been held back by the lack of appropriate training for these positions. If Aboriginal communities are to determine their own directions, Aboriginal initiative must be encouraged and Aborigines employed in key positions in their communities.

> Effective management of social development programmes as defined by Aboriginal councils/organisations necessitates the use of a wide range of cultural and social expertise, civic/technical, administrative counsultative and communication skills. This creates a need for Aboriginal communities and groups to identify or develop their own managerial, technical and professional resource personnel.[17]

Aboriginal community groups are very concerned to create and maintain a group oriented society. Therefore, their education and training should be community oriented in both focus and content, with programs which support and reinforce this priority of belonging and contributing to their own communities and organisations. For this to happen it is crucial that Aborigines develop the skills and knowledge which will allow them to participate effectively in all aspects of their educational

planning, programming and provision. Aborigines have particular needs which must be considered if courses provided for them are to succeed. Only if the potential clients' views are sought at the planning stage can these needs be met. An example of lack of planning is that Aborigines have not attended classes when this meant coming into contact with people with whom, because of tribal law, they cannot associate.

Aboriginal women are very reticent about discussing their health and, particularly, their gynaecological problems. There is a great need for TAFE to train more Aboriginal women health care workers.

So far these identified needs have not been met. However a major project, funded by the Department of Employment, Education and Training, and conducted by the TAFE National Centre, is producing common curricula and training materials in community and enterprise management for use by both men and women within remote rural Aboriginal communities. The curricula and materials will be based upon the training needs identified by these communities. Also it will assist existing Aboriginal controlled organisations to develop or expand their capacity to deliver training courses which are appropriate to the needs and requirements of remote Aboriginal communities by involving key organisations in all aspects of the project.

As Aborigines usually live in close-knit, supportive, extended family units they are particularly affected if they must move away to a larger town or city to attend classes. This often leads to loneliness, depression and high dropout rates. There are cases of Aboriginal women driving, and even busing, over 100 kilometres daily so that they can continue to live at home while attending classes. Other who have close friends or relatives may board during the week and go home at weekends.

*'Two young South Australian Aboriginal women were boarding together for mutual support so they could attend a much desired course. One found the isolation from home too hard and returned home. The second persevered for some months but eventually also withdrew as she felt so alone and homesick'.*

This case points to the need to ensure that Aboriginal students are not isolated from their support group. This has been achieved by Aborigines studying in cities and large towns developing enclaves to mix socially and provide help with accommodation, student allowances and child-care, plus supportive advice on financial, health and personal matters. There are likely to be difficult problems for Aboriginal students from remote areas who may have never before visited even a small town. Although these enclaves tend to be attached to higher education institutions, TAFE students are able to develop networks through them and so gain some guidance and

support. The report of the Aboriginal Women's Task Force[18] recommended that all tertiary institutions establish Aboriginal task forces and enclaves. The Aboriginal women they interviewed stressed that there is an immense psychological benefit in studying with people who have a similar background.

For TAFE this means it is very important that when one Aboriginal woman enrols in a course every effort be made to enrol at least one more Aboriginal woman. This 'pairing' for support has been very valuable when used with other women doing non-traditional trades and is crucial if Aboriginal women are to complete courses. Because of the importance of support it is recommended that:

- **Planning of courses designed for Aboriginal women include some means of ensuring that they are not isolated from their support group. Additional funding to be provided for this purpose.**

The Women's Task Force,[19] recommended:

- **That all government departments responsible for developing policy and programs which are used by Aboriginal and Island people ensure those policies and programs are adaptable to the diverse needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women according to geographic location.**

This recommendation is particularly relevant to TAFE and is endorsed by this report. The implementation of these policies and programs must also be adapted to the special needs of the client group.

An example of a successful TAFE course for Aboriginal women is the Certificate in Child-Care for Aboriginal People run at Port Augusta College of TAFE, SA. Aboriginal women want to have more influence over their own, and their children's education. Naturally they prefer their pre-schoolers to be looked after by people who share their values and practices. Young Aboriginal children are often bewildered by the expectations of white care-givers. The provision of Aboriginal child-care centres is a very important issue to Aboriginal women and would do much to increase their access to TAFE.

There are 12 women enrolled in this child-care course who have progressed from TAFE study skills and personal development courses. Attending those courses has given the women the confidence and skills to do the certificate course. A literacy test is given at the beginning of the course so that those who need it can receive support and tuition either in class or from a tutor.

Nine of the certificate in child-care students have children. The course hours have been designed to fit in as far as possible

with family responsibilities and run from 9 am to 3.40 pm on three days. The other two days are spent doing field experience in a child-care centre. Not surprisingly, the courses have high retention rates and students come from up to 80 kilometres away each day.

Graduates who wish to may continue on to do the TAFE Advanced Certificate in Child-Care for Aboriginal People which currently has ten women enrolled. Graduates from this course are eligible to apply for admission to the South Australian College of Adult Education Diploma of Teaching in Early Childhood Education. This means that graduates from the two TAFE certified child-care courses have the option of progressing to more advanced courses or obtaining employment in an area where there are job vacancies, not only as child-care workers but also as teacher's aides or Aboriginal education workers.

Another approach, being developed by Northern Territory TAFE, is to provide courses in modules which can be studied by apprentices while still living and working within the community, as long as they are supervised by a qualified trades person. Supervising such training is part of the job description of motor mechanics working in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. This model seems to offer Aborigines in isolated rural communities an ideal way of gaining qualifications. Unfortunately the courses so far planned using this method of delivery are all in traditional male trade areas. In South Australia the South Communities Aboriginal Training Scheme provides trades training within communities at Gerard, Point McLeay and Point Pearce. Three trainers (funded by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs) and three trainees (funded by DEET) are established in each community. So far ten trainees have successfully completed three years of a four year apprenticeship. Despite problems in identifying and retraining suitable trainers the trainees have performed extremely well. Senator Neville Bonner[29] proposed that all existing positions within communities be restructured so that community members are the substantive occupants and outsiders are employed as trainers.

Aboriginal women interviewed by Daylight and Johnstone[21] preferred to do courses in their own communities as this would reduce costs and personal disruption. When community members succeeded they would become role models and others would be encouraged to try, particularly if the new skills were seen to benefit both the woman and her community. These courses could be completed under the supervision of qualified staff who are working in the community and would be one means of reducing the communities dependence upon white experts. As this is a frequently expressed aim of Aborigines it is recommended that:

- **Module courses be developed for the certificates in health and child-care suitable for Aboriginal women to study under qualified supervision in their own communities.**

Many intelligent Aboriginal women are handicapped by having left school very early, before gaining sufficient literacy and mathematics skills to cope with tertiary education. This can make it very difficult for these women to use those external studies courses which are dependent on print. Many can, however, get access to satellite TV courses.

The TAFE Satellite Network (TSN11) which was established in Queensland in 1985 has the potential to meet some of the expressed needs of isolated Aboriginal women. It can deliver continuing education and training across Australia to the most remote areas. It has facilities for interaction between the student and the presenter/instructor while the program is being shown. Its teleconferencing facilities allow isolated people to communicate with others who are geographically remote from them. This makes it particularly valuable for groups such as Aboriginal women who may require specialised programs for a relatively small and widely distributed group who may have been unable to enrol in more conventionally presented programs because of the difficulty of obtaining and training suitable lecturers and/or the problem of finding sufficient numbers of students in particular locations.

An Aboriginal TV station has been established in the Northern Territory. Its chief administrator is an Aboriginal woman, Freda Glynn. Called CAAMA Imparja (Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association) it has the potential to provide distance education to isolated people in a wide area spanning the Northern Territory and parts of Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia. This is an exciting opportunity for Aboriginal women to be the providers of their own programs.

Literacy and numeracy require face-to-face teaching so there are particular problems in providing courses in these subjects for isolated people. Sometimes an excellent concept can bring problems in practice. For example one TAFE authority has stipulated that hobby and recreational courses for Aborigines must include a literacy/ numeracy component. Often these courses are a means of giving people the confidence to join other mainstream TAFE courses, so this inclusion would be very helpful in giving basic skills to those with truncated schooling. However, in practice this creates new problems. In a small community it is extremely difficult to find someone who is both competent in the particular interest area and competent to teach it. To hope that this person will also be competent in teaching literacy and numeracy is unrealistic. This regulation has meant that despite demand, interest courses simply cannot be run in some isolated areas.

The teaching of literacy/numeracy is a skilled job, requiring tact and empathy as well as professional training. As literacy and numeracy skills are essential before Aboriginal women can gain access to vocational education and then jobs, it is crucial that provision be made for this. For example, special funding could be provided for an itinerant basic adult education teacher who could visit communities regularly, or for investing in training in literacy and numeracy teaching for people running outreach centres.

The needs identified by Valadian and McNamara[22] in 1978 are still important if Aborigines are to succeed in tertiary study. Put into a TAFE context, they recommended that priority be given to resourcing the recruitment and training of Aborigines who would work as professionals within TAFE institutions as well as in areas with significant Aboriginal populations. These people would have a key role in assisting Aboriginal community groups to identify their own needs and to organise the appropriate resources and/or programs to meet these. They also recommended that, where appropriate, bridging, preparatory, literacy and other support should be available. These programs must be continually monitored and evaluated to ensure that they remain responsive to the expressed needs of the community. They advocated a system in which TAFE would establish effective contact and communication links with Aboriginal communities so Aborigines could receive proper information and counselling on the full range of courses available.

Government funding is usually targeted at particular issues for a set time, and the focus then shifts to another issue. This means that programs provided should be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure that they are achieving their goals and so are worth maintaining. Circumstances change and with them there are changes in people's needs. Programs must respond to these changes. To ensure they are both relevant and effective it is recommended that:

. **All TAFE courses provided for Aboriginal women be regularly monitored to ensure that they are responding effectively to the present and likely future needs of the community.**

Aboriginal women frequently emphasise the need for clear, detailed information about TAFE courses, in a format which is meaningful to them, so they can decide whether, and in what, to enrol.

The Report of the Aboriginal Women's Task Force[14] recommended:

> That all government departments administering programs and services which are used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people ensure that linguistically and culturally appropriate information about government programs be widely distributed, specifically that electronic media such as

> radio, cassettes, television and video should be used and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women and men must be involved in the preparation of such information, which must be available at community level.[23]

This paper strongly supports this recommendation.

A visit to isolated communities from an Aboriginal woman who is knowledgeable about TAFE would be an ideal solution. Aboriginal education officers from the Department of Employment, Education and Training, and field officers from the Department of Social Security make regular visits to isolated Aboriginal groups. If these people were given in-service training and support they could provide information about TAFE and relevant courses and could discuss any queries isolated Aboriginal women might have.

It is important that those providing adult education in Aboriginal communities understand and respect the lives and aspirations of their students. Adult education which is just a one-way transmission of learning is a form of paternalism. The concept of the non-Aboriginal expert sent in to remedy deficits is outmoded and offensive. TAFE staff working with Aborigines need to understand Aboriginal social structures and the local history of black and white contact if they are to provide meaningful adult education for Aboriginal women, so it is recommended that:

- **Whenever non-Aboriginal TAFE teachers are to work with Aboriginal women they be given pre-service education about Aboriginal society and values. This should be designed to encourage them to be open to the different values and society in an Aboriginal community so that they can work <u>with</u> rather than <u>for</u> the women.**

Adult education run for and by Aboriginal women in response to their wants and aspirations is a way of both preserving their Aboriginal cultural identity and of raising their status within their own communities and within the wider Australian society.

Education for Aborigines has a history of cultural chauvinism, in which, irrespective of their own cultural values, minority groups have been given an education which will enable them to be part of the mainstream society. The content of this education has been determined by bureaucrats, mostly Anglo Saxon, male, urban and middle class. It is time TAFE paid more attention to what is wanted by the recipients of that education. This can happen only when Aboriginal women are active participants in the key decisions which affect them. This means participation in decisions as to what is provided, how, and where, and by whom, thus ensuring that programs are more responsive to Aboriginal women's needs.

At Goulburn Valley TAFE (Victoria) in a rural but not isolated community there is a thriving Aboriginal education program. To ensure that the program responds to the needs of the local Aboriginal people it is based upon the recommendations of an Aboriginal management committee. This committee also monitors the students and provides them with support services through a special drop-in centre provided by the college. The success of this approach is proved by the large numbers of Aborigines who study there and who then go on to do accredited courses.[24]

There seem to be very few Aboriginal people in influential positions in TAFE and an extensive literature search has revealed no studies of the representation of Aborigines among TAFE senior staff or of what special staff development support these people might require.[25] This suggests that one should be cautious about suggesting specific numbers or proportions of Aboriginal women on TAFE committees to review issues which concern them as this could lead to long delays in forming such committees. However it is recommended that:

**When decisions are being made about the provision, location, staffing, curriculum or implementation of courses for Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women be active participants at all stages.**

NOTES

1. This chapter has been endorsed by Mrs Lynette Crocker, Deputy Chairperson, National Aboriginal Education Comittee. Acknowledgement is made of the helpful assistance with this chapter provided by **Eleanor A. Bourke**, member, National Aboriginal Education Committee and Fellow of the Australian College of Education.

2. Office of the Status of Women and the Country Women's Association of Australia. Department of the Prime Minster and Cabinet (1988). Life has never been easy. Report on the survey of women in rural Australia. Canberra: AGPS. (page 12).

3. Commonwealth Government of Australia (1987). Aboriginal employment development policy statement. Canberra: AGPS.

4. Colless, R. (1986). 'Four Perspectives on Aboriginal and Islander Issues' in Women and Work Conference Proceedings. Townsville, 15 May. Canberra: AGPS.

5. Daylight, P. and Johnston, M. (1986). Women's business report of the Aboriginal women's task force. Canberra: AGPS.

6. Daylight, P. and Johnston, M. above.

7. Turner, P. (1988). 'Who Do You Think That I Am?' in The Aboriginal child at school: a national journal for teachers of Aborigines. 16(1) Feb/March.

8. Daylight, P. and Johnston, M., above.

9. Bonner, N. (1988). Always a Nunga. Canberra: Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

10. Daylight, P. and Johnston, M., above.

11. Commonwealth Government of Australia. (1987). Aboriginal Employment Development Policy Statement. Canberra: AGPS.

12. Bonner, N., above p.62.

13. Thomson, J.L. (1983). 'Adult education and the disadvantaged' in Convergence 16(2), p.45.

14. McClay, (1988). Adult education in Aboriginal Australia. Brisbane: University of Queensland.

15. Kerin, J. (1988). Address to the national conference of the Society for the Provision of Education in rural Australia.. Launceston, Tasmania 4 July 1988.

16. Valadian, M. and McNamara, N. (1978). 'Aboriginal adult education' in Davies, A and Duke, C., (1978). Need and provision in Australian adult education. Canberra: Australian Association of Adult Education.

17. Valandian, M. and McNamara, N. above, p.51.

18. Daylight, P. and Johnston, M. above.

19. Daylight P. and Johnston, M. above.

20. Bonner, N. above.

21. Daylight, P. and Johnston, M. above.

22. Valadian, M. and McNamara, N. above.

23. Daylight P, and Johnston, M. above, p.11.

24. Pilley, T. (1988). 'Sometimes teacher, sometimes learner' in Education Victoria. Victorian Ministry of Education, July.

25. Mageean, P. (1987). The continuing education needs of academic staff: senior college staff in TAFE. Adelaide: TAFE National Centre for Research and Development.

## 9. CONCLUSION

While there are excellent programs for some isolated rural women which are meeting their educational needs, for many others there is (as yet) no suitable provision. There are a number of key issues in the education of isolated rural women and these are summarised below.

Barriers to rural women's participation in TAFE are:

- physical distance compounded by isolated and often unmade roads, the high cost of petrol and lack of public transport;
- time for this travel, the need to fit in with school timetables and seasonal farming pressure times;
- child-care for pre-schoolers and after school for older children. Often there are no child-care facilities in small communities and no nearby neighbours;
- the low value our society gives to the unpaid work traditionally done by women. Consequently many women underestimate their skills and aptitudes. This frequently reduces their confidence to return to study. Similarly, rural communities are often more traditional in categorising work as 'mens' or 'womens' and those women who undertake non-traditional work or training may be criticised or ridiculed;
- the stereotyping of TAFE as a 'male organisation'. Many mature age rural women will not consider that it has much to offer them unless a 'woman friendly' environment is developed and marketed.

The needs of isolated rural women are:

- to move into non-traditional areas of agriculture as the nature of farming changes and becomes more dependent upon technology and less on physical strength;
- to supplement farm earning by off-farm work or other entrepreneurial work due to the rural recession;
- for courses in both traditional and non-traditional areas as many look at ways of earning money or supplementing family income in areas such as dressmaking;

- for courses which provide the option of formal assessment and where appropriate, articulation into, or credit towards, more advanced courses;

- for time to be allowed during the planning stages of programs to research potential employment areas, including viable entrepreneurial activities which students could undertake.

Ways of overcoming the barriers and meeting needs are by:

- community involvement. Potential students should be represented in decision making at all stages of the program. The community should 'own' its program by defining its own needs and participating in decisions as to how best these could be met and what should be offered - where, when and by whom;

- bringing the program to the women, whether locally such as in halls or schools or by distance education;

- providing an opportunity for human interaction and the sharing of educational experiences through tutorials, interactive technology etc;

- women-only groups, designed for and by women which provide a supportive environment while the women gain skills and confidence;

- gaining the most from the limited resources by avoiding duplication and sharing programs and resources with other TAFE authorities and other education and community organisations. It is important to co-operate with existing community networks at all stages;

- flexibility and choice in courses offered to rural women as there are fewer potential students to fill specialised courses;

- subsidised child-care made available for all students who need it;

- detailed information made available about courses. This information should relate the courses to rural women's interests and experiences.

Rural Aboriginal women want:

- to be taught the skills which will enable them to manage their own lives and communities;

- to participate at all stages of developing their programs - they do not want to be 'given' a program;

- their own women to be given the skills and opportunities to teach the courses targeted for Aboriginal women;

- programs to be delivered to them where they are, not to have to leave their communities;

- special support for Aboriginal women who are not living in communities or must leave them to attend educational institutions.

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training recently affirmed that:

> It is essential that women have access to and participate in a wide range of disciplines and professional studies while recognising the importance of the work predominantly done by women . . . Providing skills formation programs is not enough, however, especially for women with dependents. Child-care (is) the corner-stone of our efforts to allow women to exercise the choice to enter the job market.[1]

He has also acknowledged that:

> the problems faced by people in rural and remote areas of Australia. . . could be matters worthy of priority attention.[2]

These are fundamental issues for rural women's access to TAFE.

Clearly TAFE cannot meet every demand. Priorities will have to determined. Not only what is offered but how, when, where and by whom are key issues. One of the strongest messages that came from rural women all over Australia - from Aborigines, migrants, women on farms and in isolated communities is that they want community participation in decisions and processes at every relevant stage of the development of courses for which they are a target group. There is a need for clear pathways for participation by communities in this decision making.

For rural women to access TAFE they must be able to identify with it, and have a sense of ownership of what is provided and how it is provided. This will require a two-way exchange of information, based upon respect for the many different life styles and values of rural women. While women's courses are under-resourced and their needs for appropriate teaching methods, curricula, child-care and time-tabling are largely unfulfilled it is not surprising that many rural women feel that their needs are not being met equitably.

One result of increased community participation would be to make programs more 'rural women friendly' - that is materials provided would be gender inclusive and use examples and role models relevant to rural women. It would also mean that from the very conception of the program, issues such as content, time-tabling and child-care would be planned according to the needs of the target group.

It is appropriate that the country women themselves have the final say:

> 'We believe that all levels of TAFE must be educated to the particular problems of country students (eg distances from venues; no public transport; calls to drive tractors; community traditions and attitudes, etc, etc.). There must be local consultations to overcome these problems. The 'city-country' gap is made worse by the very unequal population distribution and the fact that the decision makers are very firmly city based.'[3]

NOTES

1. Dawkins, J. S. (1988). Message from the Minister in Women and work. (3) September. Canberra: AGPS. pp.3,4.

2. Dawkins, J.S. (1987). Higher education: a policy discussion paper. Canberra: AGPS. p.22.

3. South Australian Country Women's Association, (1988). Submission to this report.

## APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

This project is based upon:

- information received from a network of people involved in, or with a special interest in, the provision of education for isolated rural women;
- isolated rural women themselves;
- an extensive literature search.

Developing a network of contacts across Australia was crucial for this project so that the views of a wide cross-section of rural women could be obtained and incorporated into the report. The advisory committee was particularly helpful in supplying initial contacts. People were extremely generous in providing information relating their experiences and insights to the project, sending relevant material and suggesting new people who could be contacted. These contacts included: other researchers; women's advisors; the Country Women's Association; the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia; officers from TAFE and other providers from around Australia; and women who are active participants in their rural communities. This project has greatly benefited from being able to work closely with another TAFE National Centre project to develop training projects for remote Aboriginal communities. Contacts from that project, and workshop participants representing Aboriginal post-secondary education across Australia provided first hand information about education for isolated Aboriginal women.

Information was obtained directly from isolated women by calling for submissions (attachment I). Calls for Submissions were sent to groups such as the Country Women's Association; the Rural Development Centre; the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia; the Rural Training Council of WA; the South Australian Rural Advisory Council; and Rural Industry Training Committees across Australia. Information about the project and Calls for Submissions were published in Links the Network of Women in Australian adult and community education; The NSW Farmer, and Network the newsletter of the Rural Women's Network. Additional copies of the questions from the submissions were distributed with reply-paid envelopes. A total of 187 responses were returned.

In addition, through the project network, individual rural women were found who were willing to organise groups of between six and ten isolated country women to discuss rural women's access to TAFE. Background information and suggestions for the co-ordinators and a list of questions were provided, (attachment II). Twelve groups returned information from NSW, Victoria and South Australia, in taped or written form, involving approximately one hundred rural women. Quotes from the submissions and group interviews are dotted through the report to indicate the women's views on each issue.

Some women did not answer some questions, others wrote a whole page about each issue. Others responded with a letter or telephoned. The material therefore is not quantifiable but provides a wealth of information about rural women's concerns about their education. These women are a very heterogeneous group from all parts of Australia.

The literature search included any materials relevant to the project - research, papers, evaluations and reports of programs. Much of this material is discussed in this report. It formed a background for understanding the submissions and comments from rural women.

Visits to courses run for isolated rural women at the following locations also supplied valuable information: Cleve, SA; the School of Aboriginal Education, SA; the Centre for Applied Learning systems, Adelaide College of TAFE, SA; the Rural Office Studies course at Clare, SA; the External Studies College of TAFE, NSW; Cessnock College of TAFE, NSW; Albury/Wodonga Continuing Education Centre, Victoria; and Devonport College of TAFE, Tasmania.

Discussions by telephone or meetings with co-ordinators provided an opportunity to discuss other successful programs, notably: Benalla Farm Gate Learning, Victoria; the Aboriginal Access Program, Port Augusta SA; Singleton College of TAFE, NSW; SA Adult Migrant Education Centre; East Gippsland Rural Women's Program, Victoria; Port Lincoln College of TAFE, SA; Parkes College of TAFE, NSW; Naracoorte College of TAFE, SA; Mt Isa College of TAFE, Queensland; the Queensland Satellite Network; the Open College Centre, Nhulunbuy NT; and Darwin Community College, NT. (The ACT, being such a small area, does not have many isolated rural women.)

As sections of the report were written they were circulated to the advisory committee and to experts in the field for critical comment. Chapter 7, The educational needs of special groups of rural women was discussed with Robyn Mitchell, Acting Deputy Director of SA Adult Migrant Education Services. As the researcher is not Aboriginal and had no previous experience with Aboriginal women's education it was particularly important to ensure that Chapter 8, Rural Aboriginal women and TAFE was

acceptable to Aboriginal women. Therefore that chapter was widely circulated. Supportive comments were received from Ms Glenda Humes, Director of the Office of Aboriginal Women of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs; Professor Fay Gale, Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Adelaide and Ms Lynette Crocker, Deputy Chairperson of the National Aboriginal Education Committee.

The Advisory Committee met and examined the draft report and endorsed all of the recommendations.

Attachment I

**Call for Submissions**

**Rural Women's Access to TAFE across Australia**

This is a national project funded by the Office of the Status of Women, the Women's Bureau and the Department of Primary Industries and Energy. Its aim are:

- To discover the needs of rural women for TAFE services including -

  a) specific vocational skills and job training

  b) personal development including women's studies, life skills, literacy etc.

  It is appreciated that these two areas overlap.

- To list the major ways in which these needs are presently being met.

- To obtain information about ways in which this provision could be improved to give rural women greater access to TAFE.

- To identify some particularly successful TAFE courses for rural women. this 'success' would be in relation to meeting the women's, the community's and industry's needs, being in high demand over a period of at least three years (however exceptional innovatory courses will also be considered), retaining students throughout its duration and helping the students move towards other goals (such as employment, further education, increased self esteem etc.).

For the purpose of this project 'rural' has been defined as living outside a major city and more than 45 minutes drive from the nearest TAFE college.

Information, suggestions and names of people to contact relevant to the above project are being sought from organisations and individuals such as yourself. Any information you can provide would be appreciated. Would you please respond by 1st April, 1988.

Yours sincerely,

PAULINE MAGEEAN
Research & Development Officer.

Attachment II

SUGGESTIONS FOR PEOPLE CO-ORDINATING THE GROUP INTERVIEWS

A. Try to keep the group numbers between six and ten so that there will be enough people to stimulate a discussion but not so many that people cannot get a turn to speak.

B. Try to have a group which is well mixed on such things as age, socio-economic status, interest and involvement in education, present occupation background - some who have lived in the country all their lives, others who have not.

C. Try to draw out the quieter members of the group - all views are valuable.

D. Avoid letting anyone become the group's spokeswoman - individual views are important.

E. Please record what is said, and something of the person who said it. e.g. someone with school aged children may say she can only attend classes between nine and three. A woman who is working on the farm driving tractors etc. may only be able to attend after it gets dark in the evenings, etc.

F. When someone makes a comment which is related to one of the features in B. please indicate this e.g. an older lady may have had little opportunity to obtain a formal education because of her isolation.

G. If possible, use a large sheet of butcher's paper and textas to note the main points of each person's input. Ask someone in the group to act as a scribe so that you can concentrate on giving everyone a fair go.

H. Please ensure that, as far as possible, you learn and record why a person holds a particular opinion - is it because of her present situation (e.g. as there is no hired help because of rural economic problems she must be at home to lend a hand when the pressure is on, so can't go to regular classes).

I. Please make brief notes during the meeting and write them out fully very soon after - its very easy to forget something after a few days.

J. Keep the discussion as informal as possible - groups may meet at a coffee morning etc.

K. Please stress to the ladies that this research is <u>theirs</u> - its about what they need and how they feel this can best be achieved. The project can only do this if we know what they think, not what the experts think they think.

L. Each group will receive a complimentary copy of the final report in recognition of their contribution.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR**
**GROUP INTERVIEW CO-ORDINATORS**

**GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

(If the women know little about TAFE could you please make a note of this before telling them about TAFE. Were they surprised/interested to learn that TAFE does cater for them? Again please make a note of their comments.)

1. Do you feel it would be useful for you to do a course or get more education?

2. What do you think TAFE has to offer rural women?

3. If you had no problems in getting to a TAFE course, what would you most like to learn and why?

4. Is there anything which makes it difficult for you or other rural women to do TAFE courses?

5. How could this best be overcome?

6. What has been the most helpful course you have done and why?

7. If you have never done a study course since leaving school, what have been the main reasons?

8. What courses do you think rural women need most?

9. Have you any other comments on TAFE's provision for rural women?

To help you with this here is some information you could use during the discussions.

Some women may think of TAFE as an organisation for training young male apprentices and so not think it has anything to offer them. If so, you may need to tell them about it during the interview. TAFE provides a number of programs which are particularly suitable for isolated rural women. Many rural women are very interested in learning new things, or more about things they are already doing. These include:

- courses that will help them get a job or start their own business. This can include a wide variety of courses such as catering, office skills or building;

- courses that will help them in working on their farms or at home. This can range from dressmaking to tractor maintenance to financial management;

- courses that encourage their own personal development. This can include such things as confidence building and health issues for women;

- courses that give them another chance to complete their schooling, such as reading or maths or a tertiary preparation course;

- general interest or enrichment courses - pottery, cookery etc. these can be for hobbies or may sometimes lead to a career. Many people who feel anxious about going to formal classes feel more comfortable going to these classes. They often find that after this they are more confident about joining a more formal class.

TAFE has a number of ways of bringing courses to people who live a long way from a TAFE college. This can be by outreach programs where learning centres are set up in smaller towns, external studies or by using a visiting tutor or by a variety of other means. Some of these may be available in your area, others may not - this list is of the type of things which the women could consider, it is not meant to suggest that they all are, or will be, provided in all rural areas. If the women know these things about TAFE they will be able to discuss the issues raised in the group interview schedule much better.